*The Importance and Extent of Free Inquiry in Matters of Religion:*

A

# SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE

Congregations of the Old and New Meeting

OF

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS at BIRMINGHAM.

NOVEMBER 5, 1785.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

Reflections on the Present State of Free Inquiry in this Country;

AND ANIMADVERSIONS ON

Some Passages in Mr. White's Sermons at the Bampton Lectures;

Mr. Howes's Discourse on the Abuse of the Talent of Disputation in Religion;

AND,

A Pamphlet, intitled, "Primitive Candour."

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D.F.R.S.

*Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good.*

THESS. 5. 21.

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# The PREFACE.

*AFTER I had conſented to the publication of the following* Diſcourſe, *it occurred to me that it might be proper to take the ſame opportunity of enlarging upon ſome of the topics of it, and of adding ſuch other* Reflections *on the ſubject, as the limits of* a Sermon *would not admit, and alſo ſuch as were leſs proper for a mixed audience.*

*Having written the* Reflections, *I was deſired to attend to ſome paſſages in* Mr. White's Sermons, *which I happened not to have read before. And having animadverted on them, and the Pamphlet intitled* Primitive Candour *coming into my hands at the ſame time, I thought it would not be amiſs to give my opinion of that performance, as well as of* Mr. Howes's, *which I had not been able to procure till very lately. For though I have written as much in the way of* contro-

verſy, *relating to the* doctrine of the primitive church concerning Chriſt, *as will be ſufficient to acquit me of any ſuſpicion of a diſtruſt of what I have advanced; yet as my object is the ſpread of truth, which cannot be promoted without keeping up an* attention *to it, I thought it might anſwer a good purpoſe to urge ſuch men as Mr. White, Mr. Howes, and the anonymous author of the pamphlet above mentioned, to produce what* they *may have to ſay on the ſubject. If my writings be of no other uſe, at leaſt,* vice cotis fungantur.

*I cannot conclude this Preface without expreſſing my ſurprize, that all my antagoniſts in this controverſy ſhould be* trinitarians, *and that no* Arian *has appeared in it. It is certainly an unfavourable ſymptom for them. Where is their learning or their zeal? Solomon ſays* there is a time to ſpeak; *but my Arian friends may think that that time is not yet come.*

A SERMON.

A

# SERMON.

*He that hath ears to hear let him hear.*

MATT. xiii. 9.

IN theſe words our Lord ſeveral times addreſſed his audience, in order to ſummon their utmoſt attention to his doctrine. It was a call to make uſe of their reaſon, in a caſe in which it was of the greateſt conſequence to apply it, and in which they were likewiſe capable of applying it with the greateſt effect, viz. the inveſtigation of religious truth. *Hear and underſtand* is another of his modes of calling the attention of his audience to the inſtruction that he gave them. And when he thought them deficient in their attention to his doctrine, and

 they

they did not appear to underſtand what he laid before them, he was not backward even in his reproaches on that account. *Are ye yet alſo without underſtanding? Do ye not yet underſtand?* is language that he once made uſe of; evidently implying ſome degree of ſurprize and diſpleaſure. Matt. 15, 17. And even in a caſe of conſiderable difficulty, viz. the right application of ſcripture prophecies, he ſaid to the two diſciples going to Emmaus, *O fools, and ſlow of heart, to* believe all that the prophets have ſpoken. Luke 24,25.

The apoſtles continued the ſame earneſt addreſſes to the reaſon of their converts, and Paul in particular gave the greateſt exerciſe to the underſtandings of his hearers and readers, by very abſtruſe argumentation on ſubjects relating to religion. His epiſtles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and to the Hebrews, are chiefly argumentative; and thoſe to the Corinthians, and ſome others, are very much ſo. For, after the death of our Saviour, new caſes had occurred, and new difficulties had ariſen, for which the inſtructions he had given

given them were not ſufficient. And had the apoſtles continued to live to the preſent day, other caſes would, no doubt, have occurred, in which their own reaſoning powers, and thoſe of their diſciples would have found continual exerciſe.

Indeed, it ſeems to be the deſign of providence that the preſent ſtate ſhould be a theatre of conſtant exerciſe and diſcipline, and that not of our paſſions only, but alſo of our underſtandings, that we may make continual advances in knowledge, as well as in virtue; to prepare us, no doubt, for our proper ſphere of action in a future world; in which, we may aſſure ourſelves, we ſhall find abundant exerciſe, as for the moral virtues that we acquire here, ſo alſo for that habit of patient inquiry, and cloſe inveſtigation of truth, and likewiſe that candour with reſpect to thoſe that differ from us, which it is our duty to acquire and cultivate here below.

Man is a creature whoſe diſtinguiſhing excellence is the reaſon which God has gi-

ven him, no leſs than has capacity for moral virtues. The perfection of man, therefore, muſt conſiſt as well in the improvement of his reaſon, and the acquiſition of knowledge, as in the attainment of all moral virtue. We ſhould then always keep our attention awake to every intereſting ſubject of diſcuſſion; and whenever religious truth is directly or indirectly concerned, imagine that we hear our Saviour himſelf calling out to us, and ſaying, *He that hath ears to hear let him hear.*

The ſubject of *free enquiry*, I am well aware, is a very trite one, and eſpecially as one of the uſual topics of the fifth of November, on which it is cuſtomary to call the attention of Proteſtants to the uſe of their reaſon in matters of religion, in order to vindicate the principles of the reformation; and alſo farther to aſſert our liberty of diſſenting from the eſtabliſhed religion of this country. This has been done ſo often, that many perſons may think it a worn out and uſeleſs topic. They may think that the reformation has been

been abundantly vindicated, and that now we have nothing to do but to rejoice in that liberty in which the exertions of our anceſtors, and the favour of divine providence, have made us free. Diſſenters alſo may think the principles of their diſſent from the eſtabliſhment of their country ſufficiently vindicated, and that now we have nothing to do but joyfully to acquieſce in our greater liberty; only being ready to oppoſe all attempts that may be made to encroach upon it.

This, however, is the language of thoſe who think they have acquired all uſeful religious knowledge; whereas it is probable that this will never be the ſituation of man, not even in a future world, and much leſs in this. In nature we ſee no bounds to our inquiries. One diſcovery always gives hints of many more, and brings us into a wider field of ſpeculation. Now why ſhould not this be, in ſome meaſure, the caſe with reſpect to knowledge of a moral and religious kind. Is the compaſs of religious knowledge ſo ſmall, as that any perſon,

however imperfectly educated, may comprehend the whole, and without much trouble? This may be the notion of ſuch as read or think but little on the ſubject. But of what value can ſuch an opinion be?

If we look back into eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, (which is itſelf a ſtudy no leſs uſeful than it is immenſe, and deſpiſed by none but thoſe who are ignorant of it) we ſhall ſee that every age, and almoſt every year, has had its peculiar ſubjects of inquiry. As one controverſy has been determined, or ſufficiently agitated, others have always ariſen; and I will venture to ſay there never was a time in which there were more, or more intereſting objects of diſcuſſion before us, than there are at preſent. And it is in vain to flatter ourſelves with the proſpect of ſeeing an end to our labours, and of having nothing to do but to ſit down in the pleaſing contemplation of all religious truth, and reviewing the intricate mazes thro' which we have happily traced the progreſs of every error.

If,

If, indeed, we confine ourſelves to things that are *neceſſary to ſalvation*, we may ſtop whenever we pleaſe, and may even ſave ourſelves the trouble of any inquiry, or inveſtigation at all. Becauſe nothing is abſolutely neceſſary to acceptance with God, and future happineſs, in ſome degree, beſides the conſcientious practice of the moral duties of life. *What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do juſtice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* But, certainly, we may miſlead ourſelves if we reſtrict our enquiries by this rule, as, according to it, chriſtianity itſelf may be ſaid to be unneceſſary. For do any of us think that a virtuous heathen will not be ſaved? Paul ſays, that they who are without the law of Moſes ſhall be judged without that law. They have the law of nature, and of conſcience, and will be judged by that. But, notwithſtanding this, he thought it a great privilege to be a Jew, and a greater ſtill, as it certainly is, to be a chriſtian; and there were queſtions relating to chriſtianity to which he thought it proper to give his own cloſeſt attention, and to invite the

attention

attention of others. The manner in which he addreſſes the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the chriſtians of other churches, on the ſubject of *falſe doctrine*, is equal in point of energy with the language of our Saviour, *he that has ears to hear let him hear*; and that of the apoſtle John, in whoſe time error had ſpread wider, and taken deeper root, is ſtill ſtronger. Do not theſe great examples then juſtify the moſt vigilent attention that we can now give to the purity of chriſtian doctrine?

As new errors and miſtakes are continually ariſing, it is of importance that theſe be corrected, even to keep the ground that we have already got; and it may well be preſumed that the great corruption in doctrine, diſcipline, and worſhip, which began in the very age of the apoſtles, and which kept advancing for the ſpace of near fourteen hundred years afterwards, may furniſh matter for the laborious and ſpirited enquiries of a later period than ours. We have ſeen, indeed, the *dawn* of a reformation, but much remains to the light of *per-*

*fect*

*fect day*; and there is nothing that we can now alledge as a plea for diſcontinuing our reſearches, that might not have been ſaid with equal plauſibility at the time by Wickliff, by Luther, or by later reformers, who ſtopped far ſhort of the progreſs which you who now hear me have made. We think that they all left the reformation very imperfect, and why may not our poſterity think the ſame concerning us? What peculiar right have we to ſay to the ſpirit of reformation, *So far ſhalt thou go and no farther.*

Luther and Calvin reformed many abuſes, eſpecially in the diſcipline of the church, and alſo ſome groſs corruptions in doctrine; but they left other things, of far greater moment, juſt as they found them. They diſclaimed the worſhip of ſaints and angels, but they retained the worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt, which led the way to it, which had the ſame origin, and which is an equal infringement of the honour due to the ſupreme God, who has declared that he will not give his glory to another. Nay, the authority of the names of thoſe reformers, who

who did not ſee this and other great errors, now ſerves to ſtrengthen and confirm them. For thoſe doctrines of original ſin, predeſtination, atonement, and the divinity of Chriſt, which deſerve to be numbered among the groſſeſt of all errors, are even often diſtinguiſhed by the appellation of *the doctrines of the reformation*, merely becauſe they were not reformed by thoſe who have got the name of *the reformers*; as if no others could have a right to it but themſelves; whereas, excepting the doctrine of *atonement* (which in its full extent was an error that originated with the reformers themſelves, who were led into it by an immoderate oppoſition to the popiſh doctrine of merit) they are, in fact, the doctrines of the church of Rome, which Luther and Calvin left juſt as they found.

It was great merit in them to go ſo far as they did, and it is not *they*, but *we* who are to blame, if their authority induce us to go no farther. We ſhould rather imitate them in the boldneſs and ſpirit with which they called in queſtion and rectified ſo many long

long eſtabliſhed errors; and, availing ourſelves of their labours, make farther progreſs than they were able to do. Little reaſon have we to alledge their name, authority, and example, when they did a great deal, and we do nothing at all. In this, we are not imitating *them*, but thoſe who oppoſed and counteracted them, willing to keep things as they were, among whom were many excellent characters, whoſe apprehenſions at that day were the very ſame with thoſe of many very good and quiet perſons at preſent, viz. the fear of *moving foundations*, and overturning chriſtianity itſelf. Their fears, we are now all ſenſible, were groundleſs, and why may not thoſe of the preſent age be ſo too?

Diſſenters, who have no creeds dictated to them by any civil governors, have, nevertheleſs, at this day no leſs need of ſuch admonitions as theſe than members of eſtabliſhed churches, becauſe they may have acquired as blind an attachment to the ſyſtems in which they were educated as the members of any eſtabliſhment whatever, and may be as

as averſe to any farther improvement. Indeed a ſimilar temper is neceſſarily produced in ſimilar circumſtances, while human nature is the ſame in us all; and therefore a perſon educated a diſſenter may be as much *a bigot* as any perſon educated a churchman, or a papiſt; and if he now be what he was brought up to, the probability certainly is, that had he been educated differently, his prejudices would have been no leſs ſtrong, though intirely different; ſo that the rigid diſſenter would have been as rigid a papiſt or a churchman.

No perſon whoſe opinions are not the reſult of his own ſerious inquiry can have a right to ſay that he is a diſſenter, or any thing elſe, *on principle*; and no man can be abſolutely ſure of this, whoſe preſent opinions are the ſame with thoſe that he was taught, though he may think, and be right in thinking, that he ſees ſufficient reaſon for them, and retains them on conviction. This, howver, is all that can be expected of any man. For it would be moſt abſurd for a man to adopt new opinions,

opinions, opinions entertained by no perſon beſides himſelf, merely for the ſake of proving that he has actually thought for himſelf. But ſtill, thinking as others have thought, and for reaſons which others have given, is no *proof* of a man having thought for himſelf, and therefore will not authorize his cenſuring of others. Such a perſon *may* have the true ſpirit of inquiry, he may have exerted it, and have found the truth; but he is incapable of giving that ſatisfactory *evidence* of it which can be given by one whoſe preſent ſentiments are different from thoſe in which he was educated, and which he could not have learned but from his own reſearches.

How few then of thoſe of you who were educated diſſenters can have a right to ſay that you would have been diſſenters if you had *not* been ſo educated. It is more than I would preſume to ſay concerning myſelf. If thoſe perſons who now diſlike the ſpirit of innovation were to go back in hiſtory, and place themſelves in every age of reformation; ſtill cenſuring that ſpirit which always

ways gave offence in its day (being always the rebellion of a *few* againſt the authority of the *many*) they could not ſtop till they came to *the* heatheniſm of our barbarous anceſtors. For it was the bold ſpirit of inquiry that made them chriſtians.

Let all thoſe who acquieſce in any ſyſtem in which they were educated, or which they have learned from others, conſider that, in cenſuring more modern innovators, they are cenſuring the *ſpirit* and *example* of the very perſons whoſe opinions they have adopted, and of whoſe name they make their boaſt: And that if it had not been for that very ſpirit which they now cenſure, only exerted a century or two ago, their own opinions would have been very different from what they now are. They ought, therefore, to reſpect the *principle*, even though it ſhould lead ſome into error: If the ſpirit of inquiry that carries ſome to Socinianiſm be wrong, that which carries others to Arianiſm is no leſs ſo; and if Arminius is to be condemned for abandoning the doctrine of Calvin, Calvin himſelf muſt

muſt be condemned for abandoning the doctrines of popery. It is the *ſpirit of inquiry* which, if error be eſtabliſhed, neceſſarily leads to *innovation*, that every man who ranks himſelf with any claſs of chriſtians now exiſting, muſt commend in ſome perſon or other. And if it was really commendable in the perſon whoſe opinions he adopts, it cannot be cenſurable in the perſon whoſe opinions he does not chuſe to adopt. The ſame ſpirit of inquiry is in itſelf equally commendable, or equally cenſurable in all, and whether it lead to truth, or to error.

It will be ſaid, Is it not poſſible for the ſpirit of enquiry and innovation to be carried too far? Does liberty never degenerate into licentiouſneſs? Admitting this, who is the proper judge in the caſe, when all are equally *parties?* The Papiſt will ſay that the Proteſtant has gone too far, the Calviniſts will ſay that the Arminians are to blame, Arminians will condemn the Arians, and the Arians the Unitarians, and even ſome Unitarians may condemn thoſe of their

their body, who, differing from them in ſome reſpects, have not as yet got, but may hereafter, get ſome other name.

In fact, there is no reaſon to be alarmed at all in the caſe. Truth will always have an infinite advantage over error, if free ſcope be given to inquiry. It is very little advantage that any ſuperiority of ability can give to the cauſe of error, and cannot be of long continuance; not to ſay that the probability muſt always be, that a man of ſuperior ability will diſcover the truth ſooner than one of inferior talents, induſtry, and all other qualities being equal between them.

But the conſideration that will perhaps contribute moſt to allay the apprehenſions of ſerious and well-intentioned perſons, with reſpect to all theological controverſies, is that nothing on which future happineſs depends is concerned in any of them. Much more than has yet been called in queſtion may be given up without abandoning chriſtianity; and every thing that has yet been done

done towards ſtripping our religion of its foreign incumbrances has contributed to make many value it the more; and conſequently, by giving it a firmer hold on men's underſtanding and belief, tends to give it a greater influence over their affections and practice.

There are, likewiſe, ſome other conſiderations, by means of which thoſe perſons who are not themſelves much given to ſpeculation, and who are apt to be alarmed by the ſuggeſtions of others, may relieve themſelves from the fears they entertain on theſe occaſions. One is, that no principle or tenet is really dangerous that does not affect mens belief in the righteous moral government of God, and a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments hereafter; becauſe this is that religious principle which has the greateſt influence on the conduct of men. Other principles, indeed, have an effect, in contributing to make us regard our governor and judge, and the maxims of his adminiſtration, with more ſatisfaction, and therefore may make religious obedience more plea-

ſing, and they deſerve our zeal and attachment on that account. Other principles again tend to make our religion approve itſelf to the reaſon of mankind, by removing from it what is manifeſtly abſurd, or highly improbable and revolting; and therefore may recommend chriſtianity to thoſe who are at preſent prejudiced againſt it, and they deſerve a large portion of our zeal on that account. But ſtill the great thing, with reſpect to the profeſſor of chriſtiananity himſelf, is his firm belief in a righteous moral government, and a future ſtate of retribution, becauſe theſe are the things that chiefly influence mens conduct.

In reality, there cannot be any better rule of judging in this caſe than that of our Saviour, *By their fruits ſhall ye know them.* Conſider then the tempers and conduct of thoſe perſons whoſe opinions are ſaid to be dangerous. Are they worſe than other perſons? Have they leſs piety towards God, or leſs good will to men, or are they more indulgent to their appetites and paſſions? If this cannot be ſaid of them, but on the contrary,

contrary, their conduct be as unexceptionable, and exemplary, as that of other chriſtians, aſſure yourſelves that there is no more real danger in their principles than in thoſe of others. They cannot be bad principles with which men lead godly, righteous and ſober lives.

I do not, however, deſire you to be determined by the obſervation of a ſingle perſon, or of a few perſons; becauſe there may be cauſes of their good conduct independent of their principles; as there may be cauſes of bad conduct in thoſe who hold good principles. But obſerve the general character of the ſect, or denomination, whoſe principles are cenſured; and if it be not worſe than that of others, aſſure yourſelves that, whatever may be the vices or virtues of individuals, the general principles of the ſect are not more unfavourable to virtue than thoſe of other chriſtians; and therefore, that there is nothing in them that ought to give you any alarm.

But if, independent of practical conſequences, you conſider ſpeculative princi-

ples only, and all your fears be for *Chriſtianity*, it ſhould be conſidered that every man is a chriſtian who believes the divine miſſion of Chriſt, and conſequently the truth of his religion. And for the reaſon given before, the only eſſential article of his religion is the doctrine of the reſurrection of the dead. Who Chriſt himſelf is, perſonally conſidered, is not, of itſelf, of any conſequence, but only whether he be ſufficiently authorized by the *God of truth* to teach what he did teach in his name. If ſuch doctrines be taught concerning Chriſt, perſonally conſidered, as men of ſenſe will not readily believe, if it be inſiſted on that he is almighty God, the maker of the world, or any thing elſe that will ſeem to be either impoſſible or highly improbable (by which many perſons may be indiſpoſed to receive chriſtianity, and eſpecially the great bodies of Jews and Mahometans, who keep ſtrictly to that moſt important doctrine of the *unity of God*) every rational chriſtian ought on that account, as well as others, to exert himſelf to refute ſuch notions, and to prevent the ſpread of them. But ſtill we ought

ought to bear in mind, that any man is intitled to the appellation of *a chriſtian* who believes that Chriſt (whether he was himſelf God, or man, or ſomething between God and man) had a commiſſion from God, that he died and roſe again; and who, in conſequence of it, expects a general reſurrection and a life of retribution to come.

But ſhould free inquiry lead to the deſtruction of chriſtianity itſelf, it ought not on that account to be diſcontinued. For we can only wiſh for the prevalence of chriſtianity on the ſuppoſition of its being *true*; and if it fall before the influence of free inquiry, it can only do ſo in conſequence of its not being true. But every man who is himſelf a ſerious believer in chriſtianity, muſt have the moſt perfect confidence in its truth. He can have no doubt of its being able to ſtand the teſt of the moſt rigorous examination, and conſequently he can have no motive to be unwilling to ſubmit it to that teſt. None can well be enemies to free inquiry but thoſe who, not believing chriſtianity, or at leaſt ſtrong-

ly ſuſpecting that it may not be true, yet wiſh to ſupport it for ſome private and intereſted conſiderations; like thoſe who lived by the trade of making ſhrines for the goddeſs Diana, who were intereſted in the ſupport of her worſhip at all events, whether they themſelves believed in her divinity or not, becauſe by *that craft they got their wealth*. But this is an argument that cannot much affect any beſides members of civil eſtabliſhments of religion. You, my brethren, have no intereſt whatever in the ſupport of chriſtianity, if it be falſe; and your miniſters very little. We, therefore, as diſſenters, ſhall be abſolutely inexcuſable if we be not friends to free inquiry in its utmoſt extent, and if we do not give the moſt unbounded ſcope to the uſe of our reaſon in matters of religion. It is the great principle on which our cauſe reſts, and without which it can never be worth ſupporting at all.

By all means, then, be ſo far conſiſtent, as chriſtians, as proteſtants, and as diſſenters, as to give the greateſt encouragement to free

free inquiry in matters of religion. Do you, who have leiſure and capacity, ſtudy the ſubject of religion, the nature of its evidences, and every circumſtance relating to it. No ſubjects of inquiry or ſpeculation, within the reach of the human faculties, are ſo great and intereſting as thoſe which, in the moſt diſtant manner, relate to the revelation of the will of God to men, reſpecting our conduct here, and our expectations hereafter. The ultimate object of the whole ſcheme gives a dignity to comparatively little things belonging to it; and no ſtudies, are in their nature, capable of becoming more pleaſing and ſatisfying to the mind than thoſe of theology. For this I may venture to appeal to the experience of all thoſe who, in conſequence of having a taſte for theſe ſtudies, as well as others, and of having made real proficiency in both, are the only competent judges in the caſe. Their being the choſen ſtudies of Newton and Locke, for the greater and more valuable part of their lives, clearly ſhews that they conſidered them as ſuperior to thoſe of mathematics and natural philo-

ſophy in the one caſe, and of metaphyſicks, and various other liberal purſuits, in the other. Compared with this teſtimony, ſo emphatically given, by the actual employment of their time, how contemptible is the opinion of men whoſe ſtudies have been confined to polite literature, natural ſcience, or that of men of the world, who cannot pretend to any knowledge of the ſubject on which they paſs their haſty cenſures. You who have fortune, but little leiſure, or capacity, for ſuch inquiries yourſelves, at leaſt encourage them in others. Give aſſiſtance to their labours, and you will have a better right to enjoy the fruits of them, though you may not be qualified, in any other reſpect, to contribute to their ſucceſs.

Do you, in general, who are private members of chriſtian ſocieties be, at leaſt, ſo far the friends of free inquiry, as to throw no obſtructions in the way of it. Allow your miniſters the liberty that you take yourſelves, and take no umbrage if, in conſequence of giving more attention to matters of theology than you have leiſure for,

for, they ſhould entertain opinions different from yours, provided that your agreement on the whole be ſuch, as that their ſervices are uſeful and edifying to you. After a laborious and perhaps hazardous courſe of inquiry, of the difficulties of which you can hardly be aware, it is no great hardſhip upon you to give them at leaſt a diſpaſſionate and attentive hearing. They cannot *force* any opinions upon you. You will ſtill have the power of judging for yourſelves; and without hearing you cannot have even the means of forming a right judgment. And where an agreement cannot be had (and few perſons who really think for themſelves will agree in *all* things) you may exerciſe that mutual candour, which is of more value than any agreement in ſpeculation.

If your miniſters be men of ſenſe, and have any knowledge of human nature, they will not trouble you, from ſuch a place as this, with ſpeculations into which you cannot enter, or the diſcuſſion of queſtions that are not of ſome importance to our common

common chriſtianity. But you may eaſily ſuppoſe, that, giving more attention to ſpeculative religion than you have leiſure to to do, they may ſee the importance of certain articles in a ſtronger light than you will at firſt be aware of; and that will juſtify them to themſelves, and ought to juſtify them to you, if they propoſe thoſe articles with ſuch evidence as ſtrikes their minds in their favour, and with a zeal which they may think they deſerve. It is indeed their duty, in the ſight of God, to inculcate upon you whatever they ſhall think to be of importance to you, as members of chriſtian ſocieties, whether you receive it well or ill.

There are many things which they may think to be highly intereſting *in ſpeculation*, and proper for your conſideration in your cloſets, which they would not think of propoſing promiſcuouſly from the pulpit, not being of ſufficient importance, and the minds of all not being ſufficiently prepared for them. But there are ſome errors of a ſpeculative nature, ſuch as thoſe reſpecting

ſpecting the unity of God, and the equity of his moral government, which have taken deep root among common chriſtians, and which are perpetually inculcated from other pulpits, with reſpect to which it becomes us to oppoſe zeal to zeal; and every man who has *ears to hear* ſhould be called upon to *hear and underſtand*; becauſe every man who has ears to hear, and the moſt common underſtanding may be made to ſee the abſurdity and the miſchievous conſequences of ſuch doctrines. The minds, therefore, of the commoneſt people ought to be enlightened, and their zeal excited, with reſpect to them. Let it appear that we, as well as others, deſpiſe what we think to be deſpicable, and abhor what we think to be ſhocking.

Let thoſe, on the other hand, who are bold in ſpeculation, bear with thoſe who are not ſo, eſpecially thoſe who are in years, and who have not been much in the habit of diligent inquiry. God does not give the ſame diſpoſition to every man; nor indeed does the purpoſe of his providence admit of it. Long prejudices are alſo always, or

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at leaſt generally, to be treated with tenderneſs. Beſides, as it is happy for the cauſe of truth that ſome ſhould be forward in ſpeculation, it is no leſs happy that others ſhould be backward to receive new opinions; as, in conſequence of this, every thing is more thoroughly canvaſſed; and it is only after a due courſe of diſcuſſion, in which every objection ſhall be brought forth, that there can be any probability that the reception of any truth will be laſting. A truth that has never been oppoſed cannot acquire that firm and unwavering aſſent, which is given to that which has ſtood the teſt of a rigorous examination.

As we call upon every man that has ears to *hear*, that is, to *judge*, we muſt be prepared patiently to bear with the reſult of that judgment, whatever it is. If we invite examination and diſcuſſion, we ſhould take the conſequences of it, without complaining. If the cauſe for which we contend be a good one, it will ſtand its ground; and if otherwiſe, we ourſelves ought to rejoice in the fall of it.

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To conclude, whether, in ſearching after truth, or in judging of it, let us give one another all the aid and aſſiſtance that we can; remembering that we are all frail and fallible creatures, liable to miſtakes, and to faults more dangerous than any miſtakes. Let it, therefore, be our greateſt care *to provoke unto love and to good works*, to *exhort one another daily, while it is called to day, leſt any of us be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

With reſpect to *opinions*, the time is coming that will try every man's work what it is, whether we are now building upon the foundation of the apoſtles and prophets with ſuitable and durable materials, or ſuch as will not bear the fire. And, with reſpect both to ſpeculation and practice, let it be our great object ſo to acquit ourſelves here below, in the abſence of our Lord, that when he ſhall return, and take an account of his ſervants, we may be found of him without ſpot and blameleſs, and not be aſhamed before him at his coming.

## *Reflections on the preſent ſtate of Free Inquiry in this country.*

I PUBLISH the preceding diſcourſe in part to oblige thoſe before whom it was delivered; but chiefly becauſe I do not think that the generality of even the more liberal minded chriſtians in this country have as yet given ſufficient attention to the ſentiments inculcated in it. This I perceive by the alarm that has been taken at ſome free but important diſcuſſions in the laſt volume of the *Theological Repoſitory*. It was a willingneſs to convince ſuch perſons how groundleſs were the apprehenſions they have expreſſed on this ſubject, that led me to the train of thought which runs thro' this diſcourſe; though it will be perceived that

that I had likewiſe a view to another claſs of perſons, who deſpiſe all ſuch diſcuſſions as thoſe which I now allude to.

It has been too much the diſpoſition of all chriſtians to imagine that thoſe who think a little more freely than themſelves are ready to abandon chriſtianity itſelf, together with their peculiar notions concerning it. They are ſo fully perſuaded that their own opinions are contained in the ſcriptures, that they cannot ſeparate the idea of renouncing the one from that of renouncing the other. But a little obſervation and reflection on what has paſſed of a ſimilar nature, might ſatisfy them that their apprehenſions have no ſolid foundation; their own peculiar notions not having, in reality, that neceſſary connection with chriſtianity which they imagine them to have, from not conſidering how few the eſſentials of chriſtianity are.

From want of diſtinguiſhing eſſentials from non-eſſentials, the Roman Catholics have thought that there can be no chriſtianity beſides their own; and too many of the ſeveral ſects of Proteſtants think the ſame with reſpect to their peculiar tenets. Many

Arians

Arians (themſelves held in abhorrence by Athanaſians) have ſaid that they could not conſider Socinians as chriſtians; and ſome are now unreaſonably apprehenſive that thoſe who diſbelieve the miraculous conception, or the plenary inſpiration of Chriſt and the apoſtles, in caſes with reſpect to which the object of their miſſion did not require inſpiration, are in danger of rejecting chriſtianity; though they are as firm believers in the divine miſſion of Chriſt (which alone properly conſtitutes a chriſtian) as themſelves. This is the more extraordinary, as the doctrine of the plenary inſpiration of the ſcriptures is, I believe, univerſally diſclaimed by all who are called rational chriſtians. But of what uſe is it to give up that doctrine, if we are never to avail ourſelves of our opinion with reſpect to it, and do not thereby find ourſelves at liberty to examine with perfect freedom narratives and reaſonings which are confeſſedly not infallible, and in which therefore there may be miſtakes. Beſides it is an allowed maxim with us that the fewer blemiſhes of any kind, we leave in our religion, the greater

ſervice we render it. But it is no uncommon thing to admit general *principles*, and yet ſtartle at the natural and neceſſary *conſequences* of them.

I am ſenſible that the preſent times are in more reſpects than one unfavourable to theological diſcuſſions. Very many, of whom better things might be expected, are averſe to them; thinking them altogether uſeleſs, or perhaps dangerous. They are perſuaded that their own opinions (which they have adopted without giving themſelves much trouble about the matter) are perfectly rational, that the truth of them muſt be admitted whenever they are fairly propoſed to the mind, and that all we have to do is to apply them to their proper practical uſes; and to the inculcating of theſe they would have all diſcourſes from the pulpit, and from the preſs too, to be confined.

A great majority of every denomination of chriſtians have always had this diſlike of ſpeculation, and therefore it is not at all extraordinary that there ſhould be ſo great a proportion of them among thoſe who

who think more rationally than their anceſtors, and who therefore rank themſelves in the claſs of *rational chriſtians*. Their opinions are not what they have inveſtigated themſelves, but what they have received from others, as much as the Roman Catholics have theirs. It may therefore be expected that they ſhould be affected in the ſame manner towards them. Laborious inquirers after truth are but few in any community, nor is there any occaſion that they ſhould be numerous. It is only to be wiſhed, that thoſe who take no pains to inquire themſelves would throw no obſtacles in the way of him who does, and have the ſame indulgence for his feelings, that he has for theirs.

In another reſpect, alſo, the times in which we live are unfavourable to free inquiry in matters of religion. We are not, indeed, *perſecuted* for our religious principles, and few perſons have even much ſcruple of openly declaring what they think; but the influence of habit, of faſhion, and of connections, in theſe peaceable times, is ſuch, that few perſons, very few indeed,

have the courage to *act* agreeably to their principles, ſo as to rank themſelves, and to appear, in that claſs of men to which they really belong. They content themſelves, as the heathen philoſophers did, with *thinking with the wiſe, and acting with the vulgar*; a conduct certainly unworthy of a chriſtian, who ought to ſacrifice every thing to *truth*, and *conſiſtency of character*. There is this good, however, ariſes from the evil, that ſuch perſons allow themſelves more liberty in ſpeculation than they probably would do, if they thought themſelves bound in conſcience to do what I ſhould call acting agreeably to their principles; and by this means the foundation is gradually laying for a future change in the more public aſpect of things.

The converts that are daily made to the unitarian doctrine, and who for the preſent continue members of trinitarian churches, may in time be ſenſible of the obligation they are under to withdraw themſelves from that mode of worſhip; or, if not, they will always be ready to join their influence to forward any attempts that may

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be made towards a farther reformation. And when the generality of thoſe who really read and think ſhall become unitarians (and thoſe who do not read or think for themſelves, are ſure to follow their leaders, and of courſe join every majority) a ſmall change in the political ſtate of things in a country, ſuch as no man can foreſee before it actually takes place, and which may be at no great diſtance, may ſuffice to overturn the beſt compacted eſtabliſhments *at once*, before the bigotted friends of them ſuſpect any danger. And thus the ſyſtem which had ſtood for ages, without any viſible marks of ruin or decay, may vaniſh, like an enchanted caſtle in romance. For then men, whoſe minds were already emancipated, will in a moment find themſelves at liberty in all reſpects, without any motive whatever to engage them to give their ſupport to error and ſuperſtition. Circumſtances may even ariſe in which the moſt indifferent may feel themſelves inſpired with courage, and become warm advocates for thoſe principles which they now hold in perfect ſilence, hardly ſpeaking of

them to their neareſt friends. How many are there already *ſpeaking out*, who ſome time ago were almoſt afraid to *think*.

Let us not, therefore, be diſcouraged, though, for the preſent, we ſhould ſee no great number of churches profeſſedly unitarian. It is ſufficiently evident that unitarian principles are gaining ground every day. Every attempt to ſuppreſs them by writing, or otherwiſe, has hitherto been favourable to their ſpread, and we may be confident it ever will be ſo. We are now ſowing the ſeeds which the cold of winter may prevent from ſprouting, but which a genial ſpring will make to ſhoot and grow up; ſo that the field which to day appears perfectly naked, and barren, may to-morrow be all green, and promiſe an abundant harveſt. The preſent ſilent propagation of truth may even be compared to thoſe cauſes in nature, which lie dormant for a time, but which, in proper circumſtances, act with the greateſt violence. We are, as it were, laying gunpowder, grain by grain, under the old building of error and ſuperſtition, which a ſingle ſpark may hereafter inflame,

inflame, ſo as to produce an inſtantanious exploſion; in conſequence of which that edifice, the erection of which has been the work of ages, may be overturned in a moment, and ſo effectually as that the ſame foundation can never be built upon again.

If we be ſucceſsful in the propagation of the truth, we need not give ourſelves any concern about the meaſures of government reſpecting it. This is equally out of our province, and unneceſſary. Cauſes will always produce their effects, and tho' the caſes be of a different nature, it is as certain an inference as any in Geometry, that an unitarian people cannot long be ſubject to a trinitarian eſtabliſhment. Indeed no motive can be imagined why any civil governors (ſuppoſing it to be in their power) ſhould not allow the people the open profeſſion of the religion they really chuſe, and are willing to ſupport. Things are already in ſuch a train, that tho' no perſon can foreſee the particular time, and manner of the change in favour of unitarianiſm, we may be as certain of its taking place, as if we ſaw it actually accompliſhed. And till things are properly

ripe for ſuch a revolution, it would be abſurd to expect it, and in vain to attempt it.

When a competent number of the more intelligent perſons in all parts of the Roman empire were either declared chriſtians, or ſo well diſpoſed towards a change, as not to be ſorry for it, the converſion of an emperor was ſufficient to eſtabliſh chriſtanity, without any alarming oppoſition. The converſion of Tiberius, of Veſpaſian, of Marcus Antoninus, or any other emperor in an earlier period, would not have done it. But when an *internal revolution* had been previouſly made in favour of chriſtianity, tho' Conſtantine ſhould not have been converted, the *external revolution* could not have been delayed much longer. It would certainly have taken place, whether any particular emperor had favoured it or not.

In like manner, when the minds of a proper number of perſons were enlightened with reſpect to the groſſer errors of popery, the boldneſs of Luther and a few others, rouſed by the impudence of the venders of indulgences, was ſufficient to produce what has been called *the reformation.* Ten Luthers,

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in an earlier period, would only have ſupplied ſo many victims for the inquiſition; and tho' no Luther ſhould have appeared at the beginning of the ſixteenth century, things were then in ſuch a ſtate, that, by ſome other means, a ſimilar revolution in favour of religious liberty would, no doubt, have taken place.

It has been well obſerved by philoſophical hiſtorians, that if the loſs of a ſingle battle decide the fate of an empire, there muſt have been a previous reaſon, in the general ſtate of things, why ſo much ſhould depend on the event of a ſingle battle; and that, in a different ſtate of things, the loſs of many battles would not have overturned the ſtate.

It is our buſineſs, therefore, by converſation, by preaching, and by writing, to get acceſs to the minds of thoſe who are diſpoſed to think; and without giving ourſelves any trouble about the conduct of government, to employ ourſelves ſimply in the propagation of truth. Here is a great and glorious field fully open to our utmoſt exertions, and requiring them. And while we

we are ſucceſsful in theſe labours (and the ſucceſs is viſible every day) tho' we ſhould not live to ſee any favourable change in the face of public affairs, we may die in as firm a faith of its taking place, as Joſeph did of his countrymen inhabiting the promiſed land, when he ordered that he ſhould not be buried, but that his body ſhould only be embalmed, and put into a coffin in Egypt, ready to be carried away when they ſhould leave that country.

The moſt equitable thing in the governors of any country would, no doubt, be to allow unitarians, or any other deſcription of men, the uſe of a church, or any other public building in any town, in which they ſhould be ſo numerous as to occupy one, and when their proportion of the tythes, &c. would be ſufficient for the maintenance of a miniſter of their perſuaſion; and no ſort of inconvenience would ariſe to the ſtate from ſuch a meaſure as this. This was done in ſeveral places in Germany at the time of the reformation. But in the preſent ſtate of things it is in vain to expect any ſuch equitable conduct. We may now, however,

ever, beſides *deſerving* it, be doing that which ſhall enſure ſuch an event at a future time; when it ſhall be ſufficiently underſtood that unitarians are quite as good ſubjects as trinitarians, and therefore that there has been no good reaſon why the latter ſhould ſo long have enjoyed their preſent excluſive advantages. How the belief of a myſterious doctrine operates to the proſperity and ſecurity of the ſtate, is a problem not very eaſy to ſolve.

At Boſton in New England (a country in which no man was taxed towards the ſupport of any religion that he did not approve, and which never flouriſhed the leſs on that account) there were three epiſcopal churches; and had the Engliſh government continued there, the Engliſh Liturgy, in its preſent ſtate, would no doubt have continued to be uſed in them all. But the principal of them has now adopted an Unitarian form of worſhip, and the ſame will probably be done in other provinces of the United States. Was there equal liberty in this country (which may take place, by means as unforeſeen by us as the revolution in America,) there

there are few conſiderable towns in which the people (voting freely, and all the complex influence of the preſent eſtabliſhment out of the queſtion) would not have at leaſt one unitarian church. And if one would be wanted now, there will, I am confident, be a demand for two, twenty years hence. This may be ſaid with tolerable certainty, from the conſideration of the increaſe of unitarians in the laſt fifty years, the greater ſtill in proportion in the laſt twenty, and the greateſt of all in the laſt ten years. What then may we not reaſonably expect from the train in which things now are?

The efforts of man to ſtop what they may call the miſchief, would be like the attempt to ſtop a rivulet ſupplied by a conſtant ſpring, however ſmall. Nothing could be eaſier than to make a dam that would be ſufficient for the purpoſe at firſt. But as the water kept riſing, the dam muſt be made higher and ſtronger, and (the effort of the water to burſt its way continually encreaſing) the higheſt and ſtrongeſt muſt neceſſarily fail ſome time or other, and the deluge, which would be the conſequence, would be

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in proportion to the time in which it had been confined. Truth has never yet been conquered by power, numerous as have been the attempts of the latter to bear it down.

It may be ſaid that ſince there has been an increaſe of unbelievers, as well as of unitarians, in the laſt century, it may, on theſe principles, be predicted that *they* will continue to increaſe, to the extirpation of chriſtians of all denominations. This reaſoning, I own, would have been juſt, if men had become unbelievers, as well as unitarians, from reading and thinking. But there is in this reſpect a moſt eſſential difference in the two caſes. Of the unbelievers of this age (I ſpeak from the fulleſt perſuaſion) few indeed are ſo from that ſerious inquiry and real conviction, to which alone the ſpread of unitarianiſm can be aſcribed. The rejection of chriſtianity may be accounted for from many cauſes beſides a ſerious conviction of its fallacy; but no other cauſe can reaſonably be aſſigned why a trinitarian ſhould become an unitarian, as the obligations of moral virtue are not relaxed

relaxed by the change, and the allurements of honour and profit are on the ſide of the eſtabliſhed faith.

It is evident to thoſe who converſe with unbelievers, that few of them are qualified to diſcuſs the evidences of chriſtianity, a proof that they have not rejected it from any deficiency that they found in its proof; whereas there are great numbers of unitarians who can readily give the reaſons of their faith, which ſhews that they have really conſidered and weighed the ſubject.

It is alſo to be obſerved, that a great increaſe of unbelievers has been owing to the corruption of chriſtianity; and this cauſe ceaſing, in part by the efforts of unitarians, the effects will in due time ceaſe of courſe. Chriſtianity and its evidences are exhibited in ſuch a light at preſent, that fewer philoſophical perſons, giving due attention to the ſubject (which is the great thing that is wanting, but which many circumſtances may excite) will be able to withhold their aſſent to it.

Others will object to the concluſiveneſs of this reaſoning, to prove the future univerſality

lity of unitarianiſm, the rapid ſpread, and long continuance, of Mahometaniſm in the world. But the grounds and principles of that religion underwent no very ſevere diſcuſſion at the time of its promulgation, or early propagation. The profeſſors of it wrote little in its defence, and there never was an age in which the Mahometan and chriſtian literati had ſo free and equal an intercourſe, as to give room for much controverſy. Whenever that ſhall take place, and the common people be in a capacity of reading and judging for themſelves, leſs than a century, I am perſuaded, will be ſufficient fully to eſtabliſh the credit of the one ſyſtem, and to deſtroy that of the other. Which of the two muſt yield in the conteſt, I, who am a chriſtian, cannot have a doubt.

On the contrary, chriſtianity, from the earlieſt period, was eagerly attacked and defended, the common people gave great attention to the controverſy, and it was the manifeſt ſuperiority of the chriſtian apologiſts in point of argument that decided between them.

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The ſame obſervations will apply to the reformation from popery; and had not the civil powers intervened, there can be no doubt, but that an end would ſoon have been put to the authority of the church of Rome, and the chief corruptions of it. Had the reading of Proteſtant books only been allowed in Popiſh countries, the reformation would have kept advancing, notwithſtanding all the oppoſition from the civil powers.

The controverſy between the unitarians and trinitarians has been open many years, much has been written on both ſides, the common people are become parties, and civil government does not directly interfere. In theſe circumſtances, it is a fact which no perſon can deny, that a great number of the common people, with a much greater proportion of men of learning, are become unitarians; and this has been the caſe ſo long, that there can be no doubt of its continuance.

The effect of free diſcuſſion is to produce a number of perſons capable of writing in defence of their principles. Unbelievers really

really qualified to write upon the ſubject are very few, compared with learned chriſtians. It is no leſs evident that learned unitarians increaſe, while learned trinitarians decreaſe. Theſe facts are ſufficient to enable any perſon, without making himſelf maſter of the reſpective arguments, to conclude that unitarian chriſtians will continue to increaſe, to the extermination of unbelievers on the one hand, and trinitarians on the other. The interference of the civil powers, and the influence of ſplendid eſtabliſhments, may retard this event, but will not be able to prevent it.

Some may ſmile at this method of calculating and predicting events. But moral cauſes are as uniform and certain in their operation as natural ones, and when the *data* are equally clear, the *principles* will authorize equally ſure concluſions.

If a man of common ſenſe only, without any knowledge of philoſophy, were told that the Newtonian ſyſtem of the univerſe, after having been canvaſſed by philoſophers of all nations, had, notwithſtanding great

oppoſition, been gradually gaining ground for the ſpace of more than half a century, he would not doubt the univerſality of its reception in time. Having ſimilar *data*, I think we may venture to predict the univerſal prevalence of unitarianiſm in a future period.

If the controverſy between the Arians and the Socinians ſhould be kept up ten or twenty years longer, and in all that time the Socinians ſhould continue to increaſe, as they have done during the laſt ten years, few perſons will be backward to pronogſticate that Arianiſm alſo will finally and even ſoon be exterminated, eſpecially as it has not the ſupport of the civil powers.

The *principles* on which I argue will hardly be conteſted; but perſons, according as they are diſpoſed with reſpect to particular controverſies, will ſee the *facts* relating to them in different lights. What I ſay of the uniform ſpread of unitarian principles may poſſibly be denied by ſome Trinitarians, but it is allowed by Unitarians. To them, therefore, it holds out a ſure proſpect of a final

final triumph over all their adverſaries, and it is for their encouragement that I make theſe obſervations.

To write in this manner may be ſaid to be imprudent, as it is giving an alarm to thoſe who now apprehend no danger, and therefore make no efforts to prevent it. But the friends of free inquiry and truth may reſt ſatisfied, that, as every effort which has hitherto been made to bear down the cauſe for which they contend, has, in reality, ſerved to promote it, ſo alſo will every future effort that can be made for the ſame purpoſe. The cauſe of truth may be compared to an engine conſtructed ſo as to be put in motion by the tide, and which is kept in its proper movement, whether the water flow in or flow out. Nothing here is wanting but *motion*, it being impoſſible for that motion, from whatever quarter it ariſe, to operate unfavourably.

The beſt wordly policy, in the enemies of truth, is, no doubt, that of thoſe who endeavour to ſtifle all inquiry, who read nothing, and who reply to nothing. But even this will do but little, while the friends

of truth are zealous and active in its intereſts; as by this means they have the advantage, in the eye of the world, of being known to invite and provoke diſcuſſion; being ſeen to walk over the field of controverſy without an adverſary; though it would certainly be more deſirable ſtill to have a reſpectable opponent.

As to this country, we may be confident that, while error and ſuperſtition are falling every where abroad, they can never really gain ground here. We have in a great meaſure ſet the example of free inquiry, and have taken the lead in religious liberty to other nations; and though the policy of the times may be averſe to any extenſion of this liberty, circumſtances will no doubt ariſe, that will hereafter be as favourable to it in this country as they are now in others. Having hitherto been foremoſt in this great cauſe, it will not be in the power of man to keep us long behind the reſt of Europe. Abroad they are *the governing powers*, that promote reformation. But with us, *the people* think and act for themſelves, a circumſtance infinitely

nitely more promiſing for an effectual and permanent reformation; there being nothing of *wordly policy* in the caſe, but a pure *love of truth* that is the great ſpring of action with us.

Nothwithſtanding, therefore, the indolence and indifference of friends, and the ſilence, or virulent oppoſition of enemies, let the advocates of free inquiry ſteadily purſue their purpoſe. Let us examine every thing, with the greateſt freedom, without any regard to conſequences, which, tho' we cannot diſtinctly ſee, we may aſſure ourſelves will be ſuch as we ſhall have abundant cauſe to rejoice in.

Some perſons diſlike controverſy, as leading to a *diverſity of opinions.* But as this is a neceſſary, ſo it is only a temporary inconvenience. It is the only way to arrive at a permanent and uſeful uniformity, which it is ſure to bring about at laſt. Religious truth cannot be ſo different a thing from truth of every other kind, but that it muſt at length overcome all oppoſition; and the knowledge of its having ſtood the teſt of the ſevereſt examination, by men

ſufficiently able and intereſted to oppoſe it, will at laſt produce a firm conviction, that all future oppoſition will be equally vain, and thus terminate in the moſt unwavering acquieſcence.

It will be ſaid that this proceſs is a very ſlow one. But it is as ſure in its operation, as it is neceſſary in the nature of things. Every great truth, in the firm belief of which mankind now univerſally acquieſce, has gone thro' the ſame proceſs; and it has generally been longer in proportion to its importance, though ſomewhat ſhorter in proportion to the activity with which the controverſies it has occaſioned have been conducted. By promoting diſcuſſion, therefore, we really accelerate this progreſs, and are bringing forward the period of *uniformity*; while thoſe who are the enemies of free inquiry, and who hate all controverſy, are prolonging that ſtate of ſuſpence and diverſity of opinion, whicih they ſo much diſlike, and puſhing back that very uniformity of opinion for which they ſigh. For this *period of controverſy* muſt have its courſe, and come to its proper termination,

before

before any valuable and laſting uniformity can take place. The conduct of thoſe who wiſh to ſee an end of controverſy at preſent, may be compared to that of thoſe who ſhould endeavour to keep a ſhip ſteady in its place at ſea; when our aim ſhould be, by uſing all our ſails and oars, to get into harbour, where alone it can be kept ſteady.

The great articles which are now in a courſe of diſcuſſion will not be determined in our time, but if we exert ourſelves, this work may be accompliſhed in the time of our children, or grand children; and ſurely if we have any elevation or comprehenſion of mind, we may look forward to, and actually enjoy, the happineſs we procure for *them*. We ſcruple not to plant trees for the benefit of poſterity. Let us likewiſe ſow the ſeeds of truth for them, and anticipate the acknowledgments they will make us on that account.

I do not write this from a perſuaſion that every thing that I have myſelf contended for is indiſputably true. On the contrary, I have for the ſake of diſcuſſion, hazarded many things, and ſhall probably hazard many

many more; and I have actually changed many opinions, theological as well as philoſophical, which I have advanced ſince I was a writer. But if men make uſe of their faculties at all, and eſpecially in that period which is moſt favourable to inquiry (which is about the middle time of life) they may arrive at ſo much certainty, as will juſtify them in expreſſing a conſiderable degree of confidence, at leaſt with reſpect to thoſe ſubjects to which they have given the cloſeſt attention.

I do profeſs to have this confidence in my opinion concerning the doctrine of the trinity. I do not think the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation more manifeſtly abſurd, and this is by much the leſs miſchievous of the two. Not that I think there are no wiſe and good men who are advocates for the doctrine of the trinity. I acknowledge there are. But there are likewiſe many perſons, of whoſe ability and integrity alſo I think very highly, who are advocates for the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation; and as there were learned Pagans five centuries after the promulgation of chriſtianity, there

may

may be ſome reſpectable believers in the doctrines of the trinity and of tranſubſtantiation, ſome ages hence.

The minds of a few *individuals* may be ſo locked up as that no keys we can apply will be able to open them. But it is with *the bulk of mankind* that we have to do, becauſe they will always be within the reach of reaſon. And ſolitary unbelievers, or ſolitary bigots, may have their uſe in the general ſyſtem; an uſe ſimilar to that of the few idolatrous inhabitants of the land of Canaan, who were not extirpated; which was that of trying and exerciſing the Iſraelites, without having it in their power to drive them out again.

## Animadversions on ſome Paſſages in Mr. White's Sermons at the Bampton Lecture.*

THE ſubject of theſe reflections has led me to animadvert upon ſome pretty remarkable paſſages in *Mr. White's late Sermons at the Bampton lecture*, and the *Notes* he has ſubjoined to them. They are the more extraordinary conſidering the times in which we live, and the progreſs that liberality of thinking has made in this country, at leaſt beyond the bounds of Oxford.

This

* For ſome excellent ſtrictures on Mr. White's Sermons, as far as they relate to the doctrine of the trinity, I refer my reader to the Preface to *An Examination of Mr. Robinſon of Cambridge's Plea for the divinity of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, By a late member of the Univerſity* (a work which it certainly behoves Mr. Robinſon, if he does not give up all pretenſions to a love of truth, to reply to) and alſo the Appendix to *M. Toulmin's Diſſertations on the internal evidence and excellence of Chriſtianity.*

This writer, declaiming againſt Mahometaniſm, has thought proper to join Socinianiſm with it; obſerving very juſtly p. 61 that "the title of *unitarian* is equally boaſted "of by the diſciples of Socinus, and the "follower of the Arabian prophet;" but aſſerting at the ſame time, without ſufficient authority, that "notwithſtanding this re-"markable coincidence of opinion, there is "ſcarcely any thing which the modern "Socinian affects to regard with greater "abhorrence, than a compariſon that aſſo-"ciates his own tenets with thoſe of Ma-"homet."

On the contrary, as far as the agreement goes, I rejoice in the compariſon, and am happy in reflecting that ſo great a proportion of the human ſpecies are worſhippers of the one true God; hoping that it will in time be a means of bringing them to the profeſſion of chriſtianity; when they ſhall underſtand that it is no infringement of the moſt fundamental article of their own creed.

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With the ſame reaſon that Mr. White claſſes Socinians with Mahometans, I might claſs all the members of the church of England with thoſe of the church of Rome, as being equally believers in the doctrine of the trinity; and I do not imagine that Mr. White would think himſelf affronted by the compariſon. I moreover think it quite as probable that Mr. White will turn Papiſt, as that I ſhall turn Mahometan.

But this is not the only circumſtance with reſpect to which Mr. White has betrayed his ignorance of Socinians. "They "both" he ſays, p. 63, "object to our "doctrine its inconſiſtency with human "reaſon. The objection ſuppoſes that man "is poſſeſſed of a larger comprehenſion than "than falls to the lot of mortality, and "that what he cannot underſtand cannot "be true."

Now, in fact, we go upon no other ſuppoſition than this, that the mind of man can comprehend that *one* is not *three*, or *three one*; and this is ſurely no great matter to boaſt

boaſt of. On the other hand, the great *comprehenſion* that he ſpeaks of, is that which is requiſite to believe that *three* are no more than *one*, and to perceive "the poſſibility" "of *a three fold mode of ſubſiſtence in the divine nature.*" p. 61. Nay it requires no ſmall degree of ability to know what that ſtrange phraſe (which it is in vain to look for in the ſcriptures) can poſſibly mean. Mr. White himſelf acknowledges (ibid) that "the human "intellect is incapable of forming any "preciſe ideas of the ſubject;" but how any man can *believe* without having preciſe *ideas* of what he ſays, is, to my plain underſtanding utterly incomprehenſible. According to Mr. Locke, *believing* conſiſts in perceiving the agreement or diſagreement of ideas; but when there are *no ideas*, how can their agreement or diſagreement be perceived? We Socinians do not ſay, as Mr. White ſuppoſes, that nothing can be true that we do not underſtand, but only that if we do not underſtand it, we cannot *know* it to be true. To aſſert the contrary, would be like my ſwearing to the truth of what Mr. White ſhould ſay to me in Arabic, when I

can

can barely read that language. Yet ſuch a believer, by his own confeſſion, is he in the *three fold mode of ſubſiſtence in the divine nature.* The words indeed are Engliſh, but they might as well have been in Shanſcrit.

"We appeal," Mr. White ſays, p. 63, "to the Scriptures," and ſo do the Socinians, and with as much confidence as he can do. But he ſays, "the Mahometans and "Socinians have both diſcovered the ſame "methods of interpretation, and either by "falſe gloſſes pervert their plain and obvious "meaning; or, when the teſtimony is ſo "direct and explicit that no forced con-"ſtruction can evade it, they have recourſe "to the laſt artifice of abortive zeal, the "cry of interpolation." (A) But this is a thing not to be determined by Mr. White's *ipſe dixit.* We ſay that the plain ſenſe of ſcripture is clearly in our favour, and that the *falſe gloſſes* are what the trinitarians are obliged to have recourſe to.

We are confident that we have *the ſcriptures*, as well as *reaſon*, and *hiſtory*, in our favour

favour. Our Saviour himſelf prayed to the Father, as *the only true God* (John. xvii. 3.) and with as much fervour and humility as any of his diſciples. And the apoſtle Paul, agreeably to the general tenor of Scripture, ſays (1 Tim. ii. 5) *there is one God*, and expreſſly ſays, that that one God is the *Father*. He immediately adds, and *there is one mediator between God and man*; and he as expreſſly calls that mediator *the man* Chriſt Jeſus. We have recourſe to no gloſs whatever in the interpretation of this language. We do not ſee, or ſuſpect, that it requires any; and are ſurpriſed at the ſtrange gloſſes that the trinitarians put upon it.

"The gradation," Mr. White ſays, p. 67, "from Socinianiſm to Deiſm is very "ſlight, and eſpecially that ſpecies of Soci- "nianiſm which has been patronized by a "writer, who, in order to ſupport it, has "thought proper to abandon the inſpira- "tion of the ſcriptures, and has made no "ſcruple to call St. Paul an inconcluſive "reaſoner," (quoting a work of mine). "On "ſuch

"ſuch a footing Socinianiſm may poſ-
"ſibly maintain its ground. But on ſuch
"a footing Deiſm may maintain its ground
"much better; and it is rather wonder-
"ful that thoſe who have given up ſo
"much ſhould retain any thing. For
"what is there in chriſtianity, when all
"its diſtinguiſhing doctrines are taken
"away, that could render it a ſubject wor-
"thy of a particular revelation." If this be the caſe, it may be expected that I ſhall ſoon become a Deiſt, tho' I imagine Mr. White will expect that I ſhall firſt become a Mahometan.

Mr. White is too apt to amuſe himſelf with *theory*, without a ſufficient regard to *facts*. There have been many Socinians before our age, tho' Mr. White may be ignorant of this. It is poſſible, however, that he may have heard, or read, that formerly Poland abounded with them. How many of theſe will he ſay became deiſts? Socinianiſm is no new thing in this country. There were conſiderable numbers of Socinians

nians in the time of Mr. Biddle, and Mr. Firmin, one of the firſt of men. They were perſecuted, as were the Socinians in Poland; but did any of them take refuge in Deiſm? Socinianiſm is evidently gaining ground in this country at preſent. I do not believe that the church, or the univerſities, are free from it. How many of theſe Socinians have become Deiſts? I do not ſay there are no inſtances of it. But this I will engage for, that for one Socinian that Mr. White can ſhew to have become a Deiſt, I will produce a hundred, who, without having ever been Socinians, or perhaps without having heard of Socinianiſm (which might have ſtopped their progreſs (have paſſed at once from the higheſt orthodoxy (even a higher ſpecies than Mr. White can boaſt of) to deiſm or atheiſm.

This is the common tranſition of the preſent age, and a very natural one too. For when a man is required to believe what he finds it abſolutely impoſſible for him to believe, as that *bread is fleſh*, or that *three are one*,

and is told that he muſt take or reject the whole ſyſtem, he, of courſe, rejects the whole; having no other alternative. Such is the actual ſtate and progreſs of things at preſent, that Mr. White may aſſure himſelf, there will ſoon be no medium between Socinianiſm and Atheiſm. He muſt himſelf take his choice of one of the two, or elſe continue to *believe* (if he can believe) *without ideas*, which are the neceſſary requiſites of all belief. What I now ſay is reaſon ſupported by indiſputable facts. Mr. White has only to open his eyes, and he muſt ſee them; whereas what he ſays is mere conjecture, equally contradicted by the moſt glaring facts, and the evident nature of things. (B)

"What," ſays this writer, p. 67, "is "there in chriſtianity, when all its diſtin-"guiſhing doctrines are taken away, that "could render it a ſubject worthy of a par-"ticular revelation? Did the ſtupendous "miracles that were wrought to introduce "and eſtabliſh it in the world, and the train "of

" of prophecies which were gradually dif-
" cloſed to point out its high and illuſtrious
" origin, find an end ſuitable to their extra-
" ordinary nature?"

As Mr. White ſhews ſo great a contempt for *Socinian chriſtianity*, I will tell him, or his readers, what it is that he makes ſo light of. It is nothing leſs than " the belief of the " reſurrection of all the human race to an " immortal life of happineſs or miſery, ac- " cording to mens characters and conduct " here," concerning which we believe that the light of nature gives us no information. Can Mr. White think of this but for a moment, and ſay that it is *nothing?* Had he never heard of any other chriſtianity at all, he would, I doubt not, have been in raptures at the firſt ſuggeſtion of it. What are all other tenets relating to religion compared to this? It is evidently every thing that can greatly influence mens conduct. All the great difference in *real value* of the ſeveral modes of chriſtianity can only conſiſt in the different degrees of firmneſs with which they enable the mind to hold

this one only great practical doctrine. And whether is it eaſier to do this in conjunction with as few *extraneous articles* as poſſible, or in connection with other doctrines, which, ſeparately taken, muſt appear highly improbable, and therefore muſt neceſſarily leſſen the credibility of any ſyſtem of which they make a part?

The great object and end of religion is to make men lead good lives, in which the belief a future ſtate of retribution has, no doubt, the greateſt influence. Now what can the belief of the doctrine of *tranſubſtantiation*, or of the *trinity* add to this? Being, as it is allowed, *hard to be underſtood*, and of courſe to be *believed*, in themſelves, they muſt neceſſarily operate as a dead weight upon every ſyſtem into which they enter. Yet Mr. White can ſay, p. 68, "Socinianiſm cuts to the very root "of all that is diſtinguiſhing in the goſ-"pel," that goſpel, the great object of which was *to bring life and immortality to light*. "It deſtroys," he ſays, "the ne-"ceſſity, and even the importance, of a "miraculous

"miraculous interpoſition, and gives the "infidel too great reaſon to exclaim, that "all that was extraordinary was ſuperfluous, "and that the apparatus was too expenſive "and too ſplendid for the purpoſes to "which it was applied:" As if any thing could be farther from the reach of human diſcovery than a future life, or more require a divine interpoſition to eſtabliſh the belief of it by miracles. But let us hear what Mr. White has farther to ſay on the ſubject.

"Morality and a future ſtate," he ſays, p. 67, "include the whole of chriſtianity, "according to the repreſentation of a So-"cinian." It is acknowledged, and what elſe is there of real value in any religion? "But ſuppoſe a deiſt ſhould adopt (as many "have, and juſtly may) the ſame morality, "and the ſame ſanctions on the ground of "natural evidence, wherein lies the eſſen-"tial and diſcriminating characteriſtic of "chriſtianity? Where lies the real diffe-"rence between a believer in divine reve-"lation and a religious Theiſt?"

Here again Mr. White wanders from *fact*, and loſes himſelf in vague *theory*. Where are thoſe *religious Theiſts* that he ſpeaks of? Where are the men who, without believing revelation, diſcover, or will profeſs that they have, a ſerious expectation of a future life? The probability is that my acquaintance among unbelievers is as extenſive as that of Mr. White, and I declare that I know no ſuch perſons. Whatever may have been the caſe formerly, there muſt be very few ſuch perſons now. Nor can this be wondered at, when the doctrine of *a ſoul* is ſo evidently contrary to every principle by which philoſophers are guided in their reſearches, and that of a *reſurrection* is naturally ſo improbable.

But ſhould there be found a man who really believes in a future life of retribution, and governs his conduct by that faith, ſo as to be as perfect a character as a chriſtian, I ſcruple not to ſay that, *to him* chriſtianity would be ſuperfluous. What is all religion but a *means* to a certain *end*; and if any man can, in fact, attain to this end,

viz.

viz. to lead a *godly, righteous, and ſober life*, without chriſtianity (which has this very thing for its great object) he is as good a man, and as valuable a character, as any other perſon who attains the ſame end by the help of it. Let Mr. White ſhew the difference, if he can.

But how does what Mr. White ſays here, (of many deiſts having, and *juſtly* too, the ſame morality, and the ſame ſanctions, on the ground of natural evidence, that chriſtians have) agree with what he ſays, p. 371? "The goſpel has brought life and immor-
"tality to light. It has diſperſed all thoſe
"ſhades which ſo hang over it, as to render
"it to the eye of unaſſiſted reaſon a ſubject
"of doubtful ſpeculation, rather than of
"chearful hope.——It has reduced to a cer-
"tainty what nature, at the fartheſt ſtretch
"of its powers, could barely regard as a
"conjecture.——The clear diſcovery of a
"future ſtate, and the application of it as
"one of the great ſanctions of religion,
"were reſerved for the goſpel. Hence
"we are taught to regard man in a higher
"and

" and nobler light than nature, with all her " boaſted attributes, and moſt ſplendid ac- " compliſhments, can repreſent him. We " are taught to conſider him as the heir of " immortality, as made for two worlds, and " as qualified to act in both, with increaſ- " ing capacities both of moral improvement, " and of phyſical happineſs."

According to one of theſe paſſages many deiſts have, and *juſtly may have*, the ſame perſuaſion concerning a future ſtate with the chriſtian; whereas according to the other he can only, with the fartheſt ſtretch of his powers, *doubtfully ſpeculate*, and attain to nothing more than bare *conjecture*. Do we ſee here the conſiſtency of truth, or the flouriſh of the orator, adapting his embelliſhments to the ſubjects of which he treats?

Through an utter ignorance of facts, Mr. White ſays, p. 64, " There is no period of " the chriſtian church in which the divinity " of Chriſt was not admitted, as a primary " article, nor can the enemies of this doc- " trine point out the time when, if it be a " falſity,

" falſity, it was admitted as a truth; much
" leſs can they account for its admiſſion into
" the ſeveral ſymbols of chriſtian faith, in
" the very firſt ages, if it was a doctrine
" unknown to Chriſt and his apoſtles. The
" Socinian hypotheſis ſtaggers all ſpeculation.
" It is contrary to every maxim of hiſto-
" rical evidence; and, if purſued to its
" obvious conſequences, includes in it the
" overthrow of chriſtianity, and renders
" every record of every age ſuſpicious and
" uncertain. It reverſes the common rules
" by which we judge of paſt events, and,
" in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of the expreſſion,
" makes the *firſt laſt*, and the *laſt firſt*—
" makes the leſs ſuperior to the greater,
" and what is doubtful and partial more
" deciſive than what is full, clear, and cer-
" tain. Examine Socinianiſm by any rule
" of hiſtory that has been adopted for the
" trial of any fact, or the determination
" that has been paſſed on any opinion, and
" we can ſcarcely avoid ſeeing its utter in-
" conſiſtency with the univerſal creed of
" the chriſtian church, from the earlieſt
" period

"period of its exiſtence to the preſent "time."

This is all mere *unfounded aſſertion*, and the reverſe of the truth, in every point, as I have in a great meaſure ſhewn already, in ſeveral publications, and which I engage to ſhew, with abundently more evidence, in a work which I have now in the preſs. I maintain (and I do not, like Mr. White, expect that my bare word ſhould be taken for it) that the chriſtian church was for a conſiderable time univerſally unitarian, and I ſhall ſhew diſtinctly *by what means*, and *about what time*, the doctrine of the trinity was introduced, what it was at firſt, and what it grew to be afterwards. This will clearly prove it to have been an *innovation* in chriſtianity, if ever there was one in any ſyſtem. I ſhall produce all my authorities from original writers, and appeal to the moſt incontrovertible *maxims of hiſtorical criticiſm* for every deduction from them. And I challenge Mr. White, or any future Bampton lecturer, to diſprove what I ſhall allege.

This is a buſineſs that is not to be decided by big *ſwelling words*, but by an appeal to *facts*, and the rules of juſt reaſoning from them. And now that the minds of men are awake, and attentive to this important diſcuſſion, it will behove Mr. White, and every other defender of modern orthodoxy, to be more guarded in what they throw out reſpecting it. They deceive themſelves if they imagine that Socinians will be frightened by empty ſounds. We boaſt of no ſuperiority of underſtanding. Our ſimple ſcheme does not require it. But we think we have common ſenſe, ſo that we can tell that *two* and *two* make *four*, and ſhall not eaſily be perſuaded that they make *five*.

No man can appear to be more ſenſible of the importance of ſtanding forth in the defence of the received faith, at the preſent critical juncture, than Mr. White himſelf. He boaſts of champions ready to anſwer any proper call, and of the ſpirit with which they are prepared to act. "Infidelity," he ſays, p. 13. "we know has its zealots, and "hereſies of the moſt malignant tendency

"have

" have their advocates; advocates, I mean,
" who ſcorn accommodation with what they
" are pleaſed to call the inventions of prieſt-
" craft, and the prejudices of the vulgar;
" who make a triumphant boaſt of the free-
" dom with which they oppoſe the peculiar
" and diſtinguiſhing doctrines of chriſtia-
" nity; who are neither aſhamed nor afraid
" to declare openly to the world, that as
" they have hitherto exerted themſelves, ſo
" will they continue to exert themſelves, in
" demoliſhing the fortreſs of orthodoxy."(C)

What Mr. White meant by *hereſies of the moſt malignant tendency*, he does not ſay, but I ſuppoſe he meant thoſe doctrines which are commonly called Socinian; and it is true that there are now many advocates of thoſe doctrines, who have all that confidence in the truth of their own principles that he aſcribes to them; who conſider the doctrine of the trinity in particular as the greateſt and moſt dangerous corruption of chriſtianity, and who will ſpare no endeavours to root it out. They have drawn

the

the ſword, and have thrown away the ſcabbard.

Mr. White, adds, "In repreſſing the "violence, and in expoſing the abſurdities "of ſuch writers, we act a part which pre- "judiced men may perhaps impute to un- "worthy motives. But why then are we "blamed for doing to others, what others, "if they ſuppoſed us to lie under any dan- "gerous deluſion, would make a merit of "doing to us! Is that officious in the chil- "dren of wiſdom, which in their adverſa- "ries is benevolent? Is their firmneſs our "obſtinacy? Their cauſe ſurely has no "preſumptive proof of ſuperiority. Their "abilities are not of a greater ſize. Their "activity is not directed to nobler ends. "They laugh indeed at our blindneſs, and "they rail at our ardor; but to hear the "rude clamours of thoſe who aſſault chriſ- "tianity, or of thoſe who betray it, with- "out emotion, and without reſiſtance, "would imply a tameneſs of ſpirit, which "our enemies would be the firſt to inſult "and to ridicule. By ſilent forbearance,

or

" or languid oppoſition, we ſhould indeed " give too much colour to an inſinuation, " lately thrown out by one who has ruſhed " foremoſt in the ranks, and ſounded with " a louder blaſt than his fellows the horn of " battle, that we are *at eaſe in Zion*, only " becauſe we are grown indifferent to our " better intereſts."

Who Mr. White means by " the one " who has lately ruſhed foremoſt in the " ranks," &c. he does not ſay, but probably he means myſelf; and it is true that I wiſh not to come behind any one for zeal in the cauſe in which we are jointly engaged. This is no ſubject of boaſting. I have reconnoitred the force of the enemy, and ſee nothing that can daunt the moſt timid. I have met ſome of their advanced guard, but I want to ſee their Goliah. Mr. White aſſumes the boaſting language, but I ſuſpect he wants the ſtrength, and the armour. The real Goliah in this buſineſs, is in the opinion of many, *the Act of William and Mary*. Mr. White diſclaims the aid of this champion, and of any civil authority in theſe matters,

for

* for which magnanimity he is to be commended, but he ſhould have conſidered whether he had any other ſupport more effectual than this tried one.

"Wiſdom," Mr. White likewiſe ſays, p. 12, "reſerves its vigour for exertions "worthy of its own noble aims; and if it be "*zealouſly affected*, it is *in a good thing*. Ac- "tuated by ſuch motives, and placed in "ſuch circumſtances, it not only defies all "the arts of calumny, but challenges ſome "tribute of praiſe. The everlaſting truths "of the goſpel with which the welfare of "mankind is moſt nearly connected, de- "mand our ſerious regards, and juſtify the warmeſt

* "Let not freedom of inquiry," he ſays, p. 21, "be "ſhackled." "They (the children of wiſdom)" he ſays, p. 30, "are convinced that the weapons of the "chriſtian warfare are not carnal, but ſpiritual; and "that our religion, though protected by human power "againſt violence and outrage, for the ſake of preſerv- "ing its members in peace, yet is to make its way in the "world only by the force of evidence, and to keep its "ground as well by the moderation, as by the abilities "of its advocates."

" warmeſt efforts of zeal, at once directed " by knowledge, and tempered by philan- " throphy."

What may be inferred from all this, but that Mr. White feels himſelf ſufficiently prepared, and animated, to enter the liſts with any Socinian, in defence of the doctrines of his church, eſpecially that of the divinity of Chriſt; and that he has no objection to meet him whom he deſcribes as having " ruſhed foremoſt in the ranks, and " having ſounded with a louder blaſt than his " fellows the horn of battle." If *I* be the perſon intended by this deſcription (of which Mr. White is the beſt judge) I muſt conſider what he has ſaid as a challenge to myſelf in particular; and I can aſſure him that I am far from feeling a wiſh to decline it. Hitherto we have had nothing but *words* and bold *aſſertions*, from Mr. White. I own that I have a great curioſity to ſee his *arguments*; and therefore I profeſs myſelf ready to meet him in the open field of *reaſon*, of *ſcripture*, or of *hiſtory*. Nay I, in my turn, call upon him, as a man who would be thought to

be

be a *lover of truth*, to juſtify the aſſertions which I have quoted above, and which I maintain to be abſolutely void of truth.

I call upon him in particular, to point out *the gradation* that he ſpeaks of *between Socinianiſm and Deiſm*, and to ſhew how the former *cuts to the very root all that is diſtinguiſhing in the goſpel.*

I call upon him to ſhew that the divinity of Chriſt was ever acknowledged by the apoſtles, or any chriſtians in the age immediately following them.

And, laſtly, I call upon him to ſhow that the doctrine of the trinity, as defined in the creeds of the church of England, can poſſibly be true; ſo that any man, who attends to the meaning of the words in which it is expreſſed, can believe it if he would.

I can aſſure Mr. White, that no man ſhall ever call upon *me* in this manner, without hearing from me on the ſubject, either to acknowledge my error, or to defend what

may ſtill appear to me to be the truth; and I think it evidently becomes every writer, who would not miſlead the public, to hold the ſame conduct. I have told Dr. Horſley that, "if he be an honeſt man, and of an "ingenuous mind, *he* muſt, in ſome mode "or other, either refute the charges of "groſs ignorance and miſrepreſentation that "I have advanced againſt him, or acknow-"ledge the juſtneſs of them." He continues *ſpeechleſs*. But the public can be at no loſs what conſtruction to put upon his ſilence.

Mr. White has voluntarily drawn the eyes of the public upon him, by ſounding what he calls *the horn of battle*, and making himſelf reſponſible for the appearance of numerous *ſons of wiſdom* and of zeal, on the preſent occaſion, which he repreſents as extremely critical. Let him then ſtand forth himſelf, or if he diſtruſt his own ſingle arm, let him produce the *many champions* of whom he makes ſo great a boaſt.

REMARKS

## REMARKS *on* Mr. HOWES's *Diſcourſe on the Abuſe of the Talent of Diſputation in Religion, particularly as practiſed by Dr.* PRIESTLEY, Mr. GIBBON, *and others of the moderu ſect of Philoſophic Chriſtians.*

AFTER writing the preceding animadverſions on Mr. White's performance, I thought it might be expected that, as I have engaged to be as explicit as poſſible with reſpect to the ſubject of the controverſy relating to the doctrine of the primitive church, I ſhould take notice ſome of *Mr. Howes's Diſcourſe*, eſpecially as, like *Dr. Horſley's charge*, it was publiſhed at the requeſt of a body of clergy who heard it, and the writer, in his *Critical Obſervations on Books*, has ſhewn himſelf to be a man of learning. I muſt acknowledge, however, that, had I read nothing of Mr. Howes's beſides this *diſcourſe*, I ſhould not have formed a very high opinion of his acquaintance with *chriſtian antiquity*.

The ground that Mr. Howes has undertaken to defend is a very extraordinary one indeed. He aſſerts, p. 13, that "no chriſtian ſect whatever, of the firſt ages, ever held any ſuch opinion as the *mere humanity of Chriſt*;" and p. 15, that "all the ſects differed from the orthodox, chiefly with reſpect to the *time* when the union of divinity and humanity took place, not with reſpect to the fact itſelf; the latter conceiving this union to take place at the incarnation, the Gnoſtics and other ſects not until the baptiſm of Jeſus." "The Gnoſtics," (p. 21) Nazarenes, Ebionites, Theodotians, and all their followers down to Photinus, had no conception of ever extending the mere humanity of Jeſus to any later period than his baptiſm; and the ſame principle pervaded them all, viz. that of enobling, not of debaſing the dignity of the Chriſt."

But is it at all credible, that ſo ſmall a difference as that of admitting the divinity of Chriſt to have taken place a few years ſooner or later, could poſſibly have cauſed all

all that animoſity which the orthodox expreſſed towards the Gnoſtics and antient unitarians? Such aſſertions as theſe, deſerve no ſerious reply.

We are promiſed more evidence of this curious aſſertion (note p. 15) "in the "fourth volume of *Critical Obſervations on* "*books antient and modern*, ſold by B. White, "Fleet-ſtreet." But in the mean time, Mr. Howes, has favoured us with a ſpecimen of his evidence, in ſome extracts from Epiphanius, who moſt ridiculouſly aſcribes the opinions of the Gnoſtics to ſome of the later Ebionites, and who alſo repreſents them asworſhipping water as a God. Mr. Howes alſo attributes the extracts from Theodotus in Clemens Alexandrinus to Theodotus the tanner. I need not tell any ſcholar how contrary this notion is to all probability, or how deſtitute it is of the leaſt ſhadow of evidence in antiquity. Sylburgius and Potter, the truly learned editors of Clemens Alexandrinus, were far from being of his opinion.

Mr. Howes is pleaſed to repreſent me, (p. 6) as one of thoſe, who "having been "beaten out of all their pretences for abſo-"lute unbelief, concerning the origin, na-"ture, and utility, of the chriſtian revela-"tion, ſeem now to adopt a kind of com-"promiſe with chriſtianity. For they now "*affect* to ſtile themſelves *rational chriſtians*, "and *philoſophers*; that is, they *pretend* to "retain ſome parts of the chriſtian revela-"tion, ſuch as they judge moſt proper, but "to reject other parts of it." This he aſcribes to "a want either of a pure inten-"tion of the heart to ſearch out truth in "their ſpeculations, or elſe of a conſcien-"tious adherence to the reality of facts, "and to the right ſenſe of words to which "they refer; or elſe of a clear conviction "of their own underſtanding, concerning "the origin and progreſs of chriſtianity, "the nature of its ſpeculative doctrine, or "its practical tendency, to promote the "end of the revealed commandment."

As to Mr. Howes's inſinuation that I only *pretend* to believe chriſtianity, I think I may ſafely

ſafely leave it to the judgment of any impartial perſon, whether it be more probable that the profeſſion of chriſtianity by a Diſſenter, or by a beneficed clergyman in this country, is mere *pretence*. And yet I do not ſuſpect Mr. Howes's ſincerity, as he does mine. If he be capable of bluſhing, he muſt, on reflection, be aſhamed of theſe inſinuations, which he has expreſſed in a great variety of phraſes towards the cloſe of his diſcourſe. What Mr. Howes meant by claſſing me with Mr. Gibbon, is alſo beſt known to himſelf. I hope it aroſe from the ſame ignorance which led him to claſs the *Gnoſtics* with the *Unitarians*. However, though equal mention is made of Mr. Gibbon and myſelf in the title page of the Diſcourſe, there is no mention made of Mr. Gibbon, or any reference to him, in the body of it. Are we to infer from this, that a *miſtaken chriſtian* is a character more obnoxious to a high churchman than a known *unbeliever*?

REMARKS

## REMARKS *on a Pamphlet entitled* "PRIMITIVE CANDOUR; OR *the Moderation of the earlier Fathers towards the Unitarians, the neceſſary Conſequence of the Circumſtances of the Times; being an Attempt to eſtimate the Weight of their Teſtimony in behalf of the proper Divinity of Chriſt.*"

SINCE the preceding *Sermon*, with the *Reflections*, &c. ſubjoined to it were ſent to the preſs, I have ſeen a pamphlet entitled *Primitive Candour*, &c. and I take this opportunity of acknowledging the pleaſure I have received from the peruſal of it; as it gives me a proſpect of what I have long and earneſtly wiſhed for, viz. that of having a learned and candid antagoniſt, with whom to diſcuſs the merits of the important queſtion that is now before the public, relating to the doctrine of the primitive church concerning the perſon of Chriſt. Two Volumes, out of *four*, of my larger

larger work on this ſubject are now printed, and the whole will, I hope, be ready for publication in a few months; and I hereby inform the anonymous author of this pamphlet, that I ſhall think myſelf happy if, when he has read it with care, he will give me, and the Public, his real opinion of it, and the reaſons on which it is founded.

Had this writer perſonally known me, or indeed many of my acquaintance, he would not, I am perſuaded, have charged me, as he does, p. 52, with relying on my "ſtrength "of genius, to explore all the regions of "moral, ſpiritual, and divine truth." Where this advantage is poſſeſſed in the higheſt degree, it is of very little avail in a public controverſy, carried on in writing; and therefore, though not poſſeſſed of it myſelf, I ſee nothing in it of which I ever ſtand in awe. The confidence I ſometimes expreſs ariſes ſolely from a full perſuaſion of the goodneſs of the cauſe in which I engage; and this has always been the ſlow growth of patient inquiry, of much labour, and cloſe thinking. Still, however, I am never fully

ſatis-

ſatisfied of the truth of any opinion that I adopt, in religion or philoſophy, till it has undergone as fair a *ſcrutiny* as I can procure, by means of *a public diſcuſſion*; and to promote this I would ſpare nothing to encourage the timid, or to provoke the bold. I think I ſee in my preſent antagoniſt more of the qualities that are requiſite for this purpoſe than I have yet found in any other, a real *love of truth*, accompanied with competent *ability*, *learning* and *candour*.

I would not anticipate much of what I ſhall advance, with its proper authorities, in my larger work; but I would obſerve, that this writer has choſen his ground much better than any of my former opponents, though I have little doubt of being able to convince even himſelf that it is untenable. He, in direct oppoſition to Mr. Howes, acknowledges that the unitarians were numerous in the primitive church; but he thinks that, becauſe their tenets were not very obnoxious, when compared with thoſe of the Gnoſtics, all the indignation of the apoſtles and primitive chriſtians fell upon the latter. He alſo treats me as a chriſtian, and an honeſt man;

and

and if he chuſe to enter into this diſcuſſion, I hope he will ſee no reaſon to think more unfavourably of me than he does at preſent.

He makes an apology for dwelling ſo long as he does upon the tenets of the Gnoſtics, but they certainly deſerve a cloſe examination. I have employed a great part of my firſt volume on this ſubject, and am confident that a due attention to their tenets is much more favourable to my argument than to his.

I ſhall here obſerve, with reſpect to this ſubject, that he will hardly find, in the times of the apoſtles, any trace of that tenet of the Gnoſtics, for which he juſtly thinks they were afterwards the moſt obnoxious, viz. their aſcribing the making of the world to any other than the ſupreme God. It is evident that it was their doctrine concerning *the perſon of Chriſt*, that of his not having real fleſh and blood, that gave the chief offence to the apoſtle John. But what could this be, compared to the opinion of his being a *mere man*, if John himſelf thought him to be the ſupreme God? Is it at all probable that perſons whoſe opinions were

were ſo diametrically oppoſite ſhould join their forces, as this writer ſuppoſes, to combat what was, comparatively ſpeaking, a mere ſhadow? It is much more probable that the trinitarians and unitarians of the preſent day ſhould forget their differences, and jointly attack the Arians, whoſe ſentiments concerning the perſon of Chriſt more nearly reſemble thoſe of the Gnoſtics, than any others that are now profeſſed.

Beſides, I muſt obſerve, that the deſire of this writer to throw an odium upon the tenets of the Gnoſtics (thereby to make them appear more obnoxious than thoſe of the unitarians) has unwarily miſled him into an actual miſrepreſentation of them. The Gnoſtics acknowledged one ſupreme God, as well as the orthodox, and they aſcribed to him the ſame perfections. They only thought that the material world, on account of the mixture of evil in it, was unworthy of being his workmanſhip. They believed in the divine miſſion of Chriſt, the immortality of the ſoul, and a life of retribution after death. They alſo agreed with the orthodox, and differed from the unitarians, in

ſup-

ſuppoſing that Chriſt was a being who had a much higher origin than *from the earth.* They aſſerted that he came down *from heaven*, where he had enjoyed rank and power ſuperior to thoſe of the creator of the world. Chriſtians ſo nearly agreed in theſe, as well as other points, might very well (as in fact they did) equally endeavour to overbear the poor unitarians, who thought that Chriſt was nothing more than a mere man, though a prophet; who had no being before he was born in this world, and who had no rank afterwards, but what was *given* him as the reward of his obedience here.

I am as ready as this author himſelf can be, to acknowledge that Juſtin Martyr, Irenæus, and all the writers he mentions were trinitarians (tho' not Athanaſians) and alſo that they did not ſcruple to aſſert that their own faith was that of the univerſal church. But what I undertake to prove, and even from their own writings, is, that this aſſertion is not true. I ſhall ſhew that their opinions were derived from the Platonic philoſophy, while the common people, who had no philoſophical inſtruction, as well

well as many truly learned men who deſpiſed it, were ſimply unitarians. I profeſs to make it as evident that the doctrine of the trinity was derived from Platoniſm, as that the acorn comes from the oak.

Admitting, as I do, that Irenæus and the other chriſtian Fathers were trinitarians, I cannot expect that they ſhould have combated the Gnoſtic doctrines on the principle of Chriſt being a mere man, which this writer unreaſonably demands. This was not their own opinion. But I ſhall ſhew that there *were* chriſtians who combated the Gnoſtics on unitarian principles, tho' the generality of chriſtian writers did not.

The very *creed* which this author gives us from Irenæus, as oppoſed to the tenets of the Gnoſtics, goes upon other principles than thoſe of Irenæus himſelf, and the other writers he mentions. This creed was, in its eſſential articles, of primitive and unitarian antiquity: for it aſſerts that it was the "one God, the Father, almighty, that "made the heavens and the earth, and the "ſea and all that are in them;" whereas theſe writers thought that it was not *the Father*,

*Father*, properly ſpeaking, but *the Son* that made them. The eſtabliſhed language of this creed theſe Fathers were not at liberty to alter; and it was very aukwardly that they accommodated it to their new notions This author himſelf writes as if *he* had forgotten this article of his orthodox creed. For, through the whole of his pamplet, he aſcribes the *making of the world* not to Chriſt, but to the Father. This is ſo much the voice of nature, and of the ſcriptures, that I do not wonder that thoſe who do not write profeſſedly on the ſubject, ſhould forget their peculiar ſyſtem.

This writer ſays, "I would modeſtly "and reſpectfully aſk what can be the rea- "ſon that Dr. Prieſtley ſhould put the iſſue "of this important controverſy on the teſ- "timony of the Fathers, rather than on that "of the inſpired writers of the New Teſta- "ment." If he will look into my other writings, he will find that I conſider the great *ſtrong-hold* of the Unitarians to be *the ſcriptures*. It was the ſtudy of the ſcriptures that made me an unitarian; and I have ſaid it muſt be that which will make others ſo.

I would

I would take the liberty to refer him to my *Appeal to the Profeſſors of chriſtianity*, the *Illuſtration of particular texts*, the *General view of Arguments*, &c. and the *Introduction* to my large Hiſtory, which I hope will ſoon be in his hands.

However, (if I may be indulged in a little allegory) thinking myſelf in full poſſeſſion of this *ſtrong hold* of my faith, I thought I could alſo ſeize upon a certain *out-work*, of ſome importance, in which the enemy had hitherto thought himſelf ſecurely lodged. Accordingly I made a ſally, and diſlodged him. Attempts have been made to diſpoſſeſs me of it, but hitherto they have been ineffectual. I am now ſtrengthening the fortifications belonging to it; and, here I am determined to ſtand a cloſe and regular ſiege, conducted I hope by my preſent able opponent; and if I be compelled to ſurrender, I hope to acquit myſelf in ſuch a manner, as to be entitled to leave it with all the honours of war. Still, however, I ſhall have my *ſtrong-hold* to retire into.

I am not a little ſurpriſed that this learned and ingenious writer ſhould need to be informed

informed, that, to aſcertain the opinion of the chriſtian world in the age immediately following that of the apoſtles, cannot but be of great uſe in order to aſcertain the opinion of the apoſtles themſelves, and conſequently the true ſenſe of their writings. There may be many cauſes which at this diſtance of time may miſlead us in our interpretation of their writings; but they muſt have been underſtood by thoſe for whoſe uſe they were written, and who could have had recourſe to the writers themſelves to explain their meaning, if it had been doubtful.

I have no doubt but that, if this writer himſelf could clearly prove, from independent evidence, that the common people among the early chriſtians, both Jews and Gentiles, were ſuch trinitarians as he is, he would make no ſmall account of the fact, as being nearly deciſive in proof of the apoſtles having been trinitarians, and that the doctrine of the trinity is contained in their writings. I think that I can prove that the chriſtians of the early ages were unitarians; and this is one reaſon, independent

of my own interpretation of their writings, why I conclude that the apoſtles were ſo.

" Surely," ſays this writer, p. 8, " it muſt " be acknowledged, that the divinity of " Chriſt is a doctrine which the ſacred " ſcriptures *ſeem* to maintain ; and Dr. " Prieſtley himſelf will not wonder that a " plain unlettered chriſtian, who has bor- " rowed but little light from philoſophy, " ſhould imagine he reads it there." So, I own the caſe *did* appear to myſelf *formerly*. But as I read them *now*, the ſcriptures do not ſeem to teach any ſuch doctrine, but, in the plaineſt of all language, ſuch as the moſt unlettered chriſtian muſt underſtand, they uniformly and emphatically teach the contrary doctrine, viz. that the Father is the only true God, and Chriſt the creature, the meſſenger, and the ſervant of that God.

Without entering particularly into the argument at preſent, I appeal to the general tenor of the ſcriptures, in which *God* and *Chriſt* are conſtantly mentioned as beings, or perſons, of a quite different *rank*, much more ſo than *man* and *beaſt*. They are never once confounded ; and in no ſenſe whatever,

ever, not even in the loweſt of all, is Chriſt ſo much as called *God* in all the New Teſtament. I beg my candid antagoniſt only to read over the few following plain paſſages, and let him ſay, if he does not find great difficulty in accommodating them to his ſyſtem. And theſe are only a very few of what I might have produced, as containing, in the plaineſt words, the ſame great doctrine.

Ex. xx. 3. *Thou ſhalt have no other God beſides me.* Deut. vi. 4. *Hear, O Iſrael, the Lord our God is one Lord,* which is called, (Mark xii. 29.) by our Saviour himſelf, *the firſt of all the commandments.* 1 Cor. viii. 6. *To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jeſus Chriſt, by whom are all things, and we by him.* Eph. iv. 56. *One Lord, one faith, one baptiſm. One God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* 1 Tim. ii. 5. *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus.*

With reſpect to that one text, which this writer ſelects, as no doubt thinking it to be particulariy favourable to his purpoſe, viz. 1 John v. 20. *And we are in him that is true,*

even *in his ſon Jeſus Chriſt. This is the true God and eternal life.* I take the liberty to refer him to my *Illuſtration of particular texts of Scripture*, p. 31, where he may learn that by the phraſes, viz. *him that is true*, and *the true God*, we are to underſtand God the Father only, the ſame whom our Saviour himſelf expreſſly ſtiles *the ouly true God*, when, in his ſolemn prayer (John xvii. 3.) he ſaid *that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jeſus Chriſt whom thou haſt ſent.* This alone ſhould make us conſider any interpretation of a paſſage which ſhould make it ſay that there was *another true God*, as neceſſarily wrong, whatever other meaning ſhould be put upon it. Suppoſing that in ſome part of the Engliſh old Teſtament (in which the doctrine of the unity of God is ſo fully taught) it ſhould be ſaid that Moſes was the true God; would any man, on that account, believe him to be ſo. He would immediately ſay that it muſt either be a wrong tranſlation, that ſomething elſe was intended beſides what the words *ſeemed* to import, or that the paſſage was an interpolation.

If

If we be influenced by what only *ſeems* to be contained in the ſcriptures, without uſing our reaſon in the interpretation of them, we may as well at once admit the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation. For nothing can be more directly taught in the *words* of Scripture. Does not our Saviour himſelf ſay (Mat. xxvi. 26.) *Take eat, this is my body;* and likewiſe, v. 27. *drink yea all of it; for this is my blood?* Did he not alſo ſay, in the ſynagogue of Capernaum, *Verily, verily I ſay unto you, except ye eat the fleſh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. He that eateth my fleſh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him,* with much more to the ſame purpoſe? There is no maxim of criticiſm clearer than this, viz. that no man of common underſtanding could mean to ſay either what was manifeſtly abſurd, or what ſhould be a flat contradiction to what he had expreſſly and repeatedly aſſerted. Now nothing can be more abſurd than the doctrine of *three divine perſons* making only *one God*; nor can any writers more expreſsly contradict themſelves, than by firſt teaching the doctrine of *one God*; calling that God *the Father*; and even *the God and Father of Chriſt,*

and then ſaying that this Chriſt is himſelf God, equal to his own God and father. If I could make no ſenſe at all of any particular paſſages, that might be found in any of the ſacred writings, I ſhould ſay, without ſcruple, that this could not be their ſenſe.

It is uſual with zealous trinitarians to alarm their hearers and readers with the *danger* of denying the divinity of Chriſt, and the *dread* they ought to entertain of diſbelieving ſo great a truth, degrading their God and their Maker to the condition of a mortal man. But, on the contrary, on the ſuppoſition that the Father is the only true God (which is clearly the doctrine of the ſcriptures) is there no danger in making, and worſhiping, another God, and of exalting to this high rank a mere man like ourſelves? Should we entertain no dread of infringing ſo great and fundamental a principle of revealed religion, as that of the *divine unity*; eſpecially conſidering that the ſcriptures abound with cautions, and the ſtrongeſt admonitions on this ſubject; whereas it cannot be pretended that we are any where cautioned againſt not admitting the divinity

divinity of Chriſt. There are numberleſs paſſages in the ſcriptures, in which the one God the Father denounces the ſevereſt judgments againſt thoſe who *give his glory to another*, but none in which Chriſt threatens any puniſhment to thoſe who will not honour him as God.

Let the two caſes then be calmly conſidered, and let not trinitarians think their doctrine, if erroneous, a leſs dangerous one than ours; and let them be more careful how they paſs their ſentences of damnation upon thoſe, who, though they ſhould be miſtaken, are ſo in conſeqnence of being concerned to maintain the unrivalled honour of the one true God, againſt any infringement of it, by heathens or chriſtians; eſpecially while their tempers and conduct are as exemplary as their own. The time is approaching which will ſhew who they are that are now contending for *truth*, and who for *error*, and alſo from what motives, and what kind of ſpirit they engage in the controverſy. It is with ſatisfaction that I look forward towards that time.

My candid antagoniſt aſks (p. 48) when "the ſyſtem of goſpel doctrine has been re-

"formed"

"formed" according to my plan, "what "advantage has the chriſtian, and what "profit is there of the goſpel? Compared "with philoſophy it can boaſt but of little "ſuperiority; compared with Judaiſm ſcarce "any ſuperiority at all." But I would aſk him, in my turn, is there no advantage in the certain knowledge of a *reſurrection* and of a *ſtate of retribution* to come, which is the only great and powerful ſanction of virtue, and which alone can enable a man to bear the trials of life, and to die with hope and joy?

By what ſtandard of value and worth muſt that man judge, who can ſay, that this conſideration weighs nothing, and ſuch doctrines as the *trinity*, and *atonement* weigh much? Let us judge of *principles* as our Saviour teaches us to judge of *men*, viz. *by their fruits*. Now what fruits are the myſterious doctrines which this writer rates ſo high, in their nature, *capable* of producing, compared with thoſe of that one great doctrine which he ſeems to have overlooked?

An experienced phyſician, conſidering the ingredients of an approved family medicine, will eaſily diſtinguiſh thoſe drugs that

are

are operative from thoſe that are inſignificant, or that counteract the effects of the reſt. Now let a man who only underſtands human nature, examine my creed, and that of my antagoniſt, admitting that we both of us live as becomes chriſtians, and have ſome common principles that aſſiſt us in doing ſo. Is it the doctrine of *three perſons in one* God, or the belief of one ſimple intelligent being, the maker and governor of all things? Is it the doctrine of *atonement*, which ſuppoſes that God never forgives any ſin till a full ſatisfaction has been made to his offended juſtice (a dangerous pattern for man to follow) or the belief that he requires no ſatisfaction at all beſides repentance on the part of the offender? Which of theſe doctrines is naturally better calculated to enſure our love, reverence, and obedience to God? My own opinion is known, and therefore alſo what I muſt ſuppoſe an impartial judge would determine in the caſe. But ſtill theſe are ſmall ingredients in the *medicine* that I am ſpeaking of. The great and effective one is the firm belief of a future life, which is common to us both.

Did

Did chriſtians attend more to the conſideration of that *life and immortality which is brought to light by the goſpel*; the knowledge of which it has extended to all mankind, we ſhould make leſs account of all other matters. Agreeing in the belief and expectation of a reſurrection and a future immortal life, we agree in every thing that is of real efficay to elevate the mind, to warm the heart, and to reform the life. This is that one noble *tree of life*, which has been too long concealed by timber of an ignoble kind, with which it has been crouded, and which I wiſh to lend a hand to extirpate and remove. And (to uſe a compariſon ſimilar to a very fine one made uſe of by a writer in the *Theological Repoſitory*) if, in my zeal to clear away theſe incumbrances, I ſhould happen to touch the bark of the tree itſelf, I hope it will be forgiven me. My meaning was good, and the blow was honeſtly directed to favour the tree, and make it appear to proper advantage.

NOTES.

# NOTES.

(A) Note p. 64. When Mr. White wrote this he hardly recollected his high and juſt encomium on Dr. Clarke and Newton, neither of them Trinitarians, and the laſt thought by many to have been a Socinian, and who, in two *Letters to Mr. Le Clerc*, has clearly ſhewn the certainty of the only conſiderable *interpolations* that Mr. White can allude to, viz. that of Tim. 3. 17. *God manifeſted in the fleſh*, and 1 John 5. 6. of the *three that bear record in heaven*, "Who" ſays Mr. White, p. 38. "are the champions of infidelity to be compared "with a Taylor, a Wilkins, a Cudworth, a Bar-"row, a Clarke, a Boyle, and a Newton?"

Had all ſuch men as Locke, Clarke, and Newton, acted with perfect uprightneſs, and true wiſdom, as well as thought with freedom, the church of England would not now have been Trinitarian; and yet declamatory preaching would ſtill have been on the ſide of the eſtabliſhed faith in all its changes. What Mr. White ſays of the church of England in its preſent ſtate, is alſo ſaid by the members of the church of Rome, has ever been ſaid by the members of all eſtabliſhed churches, and will no doubt continue to be ſaid thro' all their future variations. "We who live in theſe "enlightened times" p. 472, "have no miſcon-"ceptions of chriſtianity to ſet right, no corrup-"tions of it to purify." This is more than I would chuſe to ſay of my own opinions. I may ſee reaſon to change them to-morrow, and then ſhould be aſhamed of the boaſt of to-day. If Mr. White be a young man, as by his ſtyle I ſuſ-

ſpect

pect him to be, he may live to ſee a change in the creed of his all-perfect national church.

NOTE (B) p. 66.

Mr. White's total inattention to *facts* is conſpicuous in other parts of his work. The object of the moſt admired, I believe, of his diſcourſes, is to ſhew that the forms of free government, and the progreſs that has been made in arts and ſciences in chriſtendom, are owing to chriſtianity, and that the deſpotiſm and ignorance of the Mahometans are owing to their religious principles. But, in fact, he might with as much reaſon aſſert that the philoſophical diſcoveries of Socinians are owing to their Socinianiſm, that thoſe made by foreign philoſophers (the greater part of whom are Atheiſts) are owing to their Atheniſm, or that Tenterden ſteeple was the cauſe of Goodwin's ſands.

He does not conſider that, though the firſt Caliphs were rude barbarians, and one of them ordered the famous library at Alexandria to be burnt, their ſucceſſors were, for ſome centuries, the greateſt patrons of literature and ſcience in the world, and would have redeemed ſuch a library at any price. He does not conſider, or perhaps never heard (for if he had it became him not to have concealed ſo important a circumſtance) that they ſpared no expence to procure Greek books, and to get them tranſlated into Arabic; and that one principal means of the chriſtian world emerging from its barbariſm, was their becoming the ſcholars of Mahometans.

If Unitarianiſm be ſo near a-kin to Mahometaniſm as Mr. White repreſents it to be, it might be expected to be equally unfavourable to the purſuits of literature and improvements in ſcience. And if Trinitarianiſm be the eſſence and quint-

eſſence

eſſence of chriſtianity, which is ſo highly and excluſively favourable to all intellectual exertion, it would hardly be doubted but that (if there ſhould be ſuch prodigies as Unitarian poets, critics, hiſtorians, or philoſophers) in looking over a liſt of thoſe who have at all diſtinguiſhed themſelves by works of taſte, or diſcoveries in ſcience, the Trinitarians might be known by the ſuperiority of their genius, and the greater light they have thrown upon the knowledge of nature, having (as Mr. White might ſay) ſo much more perfect knowledge of the God of nature; and, without aſking any queſtions, it might be taken for granted that the moſt eminent in every walk of literature were the divines of Rome, and of Oxford. But if Mr. White will caſt his eye on a liſt of writers and inventors, he will find the facts as ill to correſpond to this theory as the others that I have mentioned in this note.

Unitarians and all ſectaries are, to the diſgrace of this country, excluded from the advantages of the univerſities. But God, our impartial father, has not with-held his common gifts. He has diſtributed his talents without diſtinction of Trinitarian or Unitarian, and has by one means or other put it in our power to make the improvement of them that he requires.

Mr. White's declaiming about the connection between chriſtianity and free government, is equally unſupported by reaſon, or facts. Did the Roman empire become free from the time of its being chriſtian, or was there ever any chriſtian government in Aſia or Africa that was a free one? Are there not ſeveral of the chriſtian ſtates in Europe in which the people have no ſhare in the government, either in making laws or impoſing taxes?

And

And has it not been manifeſtly owing to other circumſtances, and not to their chriſtianity, that any of them are free?

NOTE (C) p. 78.

As it is poſſible that Mr. White may allude to the ſubject of the following *Hiſtory*, which was never publiſhed except in a newſpaper, and I am informed that credit is ſtill given to the idle tale, I have thought it might not be amiſs to inſert it here, exactly as it was printed twelve years ago.

## The HISTORY of a CALUMNY.

*From the St. James's Chronicle of Jan.* 21, 1773.

Having been much ſolicited to inquire into the foundation of a report, which was calculated to be very injurious to me, by repreſenting me as a real enemy, at the ſame time that I pretended to be a zealous friend, of chriſtianity, I at length undertook to do it, partly to amuſe myſelf, and partly to oblige my friends; being ſenſible, that if I had not already given the fulleſt ſatisfaction with reſpect to my being a ſincere believer of chriſtianity, it could not be in my power to do it; and that even the profeſſed defence of the evidences of chriſtianity, which I have juſt publiſhed, would not make any impreſſion in my favour.

About the middle of the laſt ſummer I was informed, from very credible authority, that Mr. John Carr, Architect (and, I believe, then Mayor) of York, declared in a private company, conſiſting of very reſpectable perſons of the county of York (and alledged it as an evidence of the Diſſenters being, notwithſtanding their profeſſions, the ſecret and determined enemies of chriſtianity) that he had ſeen a letter of Dr. Prieſtley's, written to a confidential friend, in which he had ſaid, that "He "hoped he ſhould live to ſee the time when the "impoſture

"impoſture of chriſtianity would be baniſhed out "the world, or words to that effect." Some time after alſo a ſtranger wrote to me, informing me that much credit was given to the ſtory, and requeſting an explanation of it.

Mr. Carr, to whom I wrote upon the ſubject, declares, in a letter dated Nov. 1, 1772, that the charge againſt him was falſe and exaggerated; but that, about a year before, he was on a viſit at Mr. Oborne's, of Ravensfield, near Doncaſter, when Mr. Samuel Walker, of Rotherham, ſaid that I had expreſſed myſelf, in a letter (which he *thinks* Mr. Walker ſaid he had ſeen) that "I had no "great belief in Jeſus Chriſt, or words to that "effect;" and that Mr. Walker added other expreſſions from my letter, much to the ſame purport, which he remembered "tended to leſſen the "varacity of our Saviour." For the truth of this account he appeals to Mr. Oborne, in whoſe houſe the converſation paſſed.

On the other hand, Mr. Aaron Walker (whom, it ſeems, Mr. Carr had miſtaken for his brother Samuel) declares, in a letter to me, dated Nov. 28, that all he ſaid at Mr. Oborne's was, that he had been informed by my brother (the Rev. Mr. Prieſtley, of Mancheſter) at the houſe of his brother Samuel Walker, and in the preſence of his brother, Mr. Thorpe, and ſeveral others, that I had ſaid "that myſelf and ſome others, would "not reſt till we had rooted out of the church the "idol Chriſt;" and that, being interrogated at Mr. Oborne's, whether I had written or ſpoken it? he ſaid "he was not certain, but he believed I "had done both."

This brings the ſtory to the ſtate in which I had heard of it very near two years before. For a correſpondent of mine, in the Weſt of England, then

then informed me, that it was currently reported in his neighbourhood, and all over that part of the country, that I had boaſted, in the preſence of the Rev. Mr. Hitchin, of London, that, "I would "not reſt till I had pulled down that idol Jeſus "Chriſt." This is alſo referred to, as a *threatening* of what I would do (though my name is not mentioned) in an anonymous pamphlet, publiſhed this laſt ſummer; and a gentleman of diſtinguiſhed worth ſome time after informed a friend of mine, that it was ſaid to have been one of the curious things which the Biſhop of Llandaff had quoted, in order to render myſelf, and the Diſſenters in general, obnoxious to the government, in the Houſe of Lords.

Being in London in the ſpring of this year, I aſked Mr. Hitchin, whether he had ever heard me make any ſuch ſpeech as that abovementioned. He ſaid he had not, but that he had heard it of my brother, in his houſe. Afterwards, meeting with Mr. Hitchin and my brother together in Yorkſhire, and deſiring an explanation of this buſineſs, my brother acknowledged that he had ſaid "he believed "I would endeavour all I could to extirpate the "doctrine of the Divinity of Chriſt," but that he had no authority for this, except my writings.

Thus this report, which, I am informed, has been eagerly propagated in many parts of England, comes to nothing more than this, that ſome of the more ſagacious readers of my Theological Writings have been able to collect from them, that with reſpect to the doctrine of the Trinity, my ſentiments are not Athanaſian.

It may amuſe ſome ſpeculative perſons, who attend to the influence of prejudice, to obſerve how much this report has gained in paſſing through a very few hands, viz. from my brother to Mr. Hitchin, or Mr. Walker, and from Mr. Walker to Mr. Carr.

The

The greateſt difference is between Mr. Carr and Mr. Walker, the former repreſenting me as an enemy to chriſtianity itſelf, and one who would rejoice in the extirpation of it; and the other as an enemy to what I conſider as a great corruption of chriſtianity, and therefore as one who would rejoice in the purification and extenſion of it. I know nothing of either of theſe gentlemen, but from common report, which ſpeaks of Mr. Walker as a zealous Calviniſt, and of Mr. Carr as a zealous Churchman; which of them may be preſumed, from theſe circumſtances, to be more diſpoſed to calumniate me, and therefore which of them is more probably the guilty perſon, I leave others to determine. There is alſo a conſiderable difference between the account of my brother and that of Mr. Walker, or Mr. Hitchin; but ſince the original author of this report diſavows it, I do not think it any buſineſs of mine to reconcile theſe inconſiſtencies. Let them do it, if they chuſe, among themſelves.

I wiſh this affair may be a leſſon to them, and others, not to be ſo ready to propagate reports to the prejudice of perſons who are odious to them on account of their religious principles; leſt, inſtead of gaining their end, in diſcrediting others, they ſhould diſcover the malignity of their own tempers, by ſhewing a propenſity to ſlander their neighbours, and thereby bring diſgrace upon themſelves, with all men of ſenſe and integrity.

*Leeds*, Dec. 19. JOSEPH PRIESTLEY.

*N. B. A copy of this paper has been ſent to all the perſons whoſe names are mentioned in it.*

FINIS.

A

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